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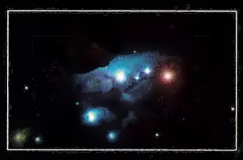

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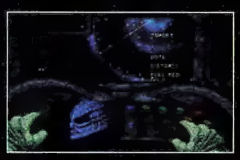

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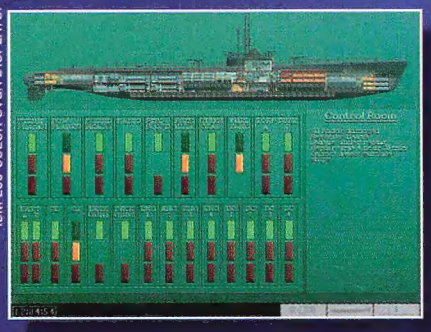

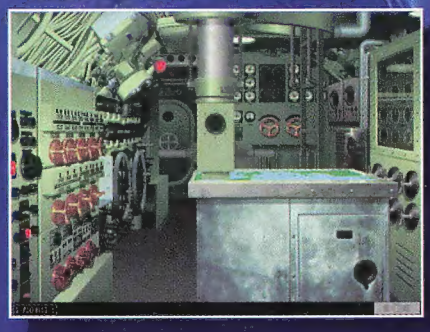

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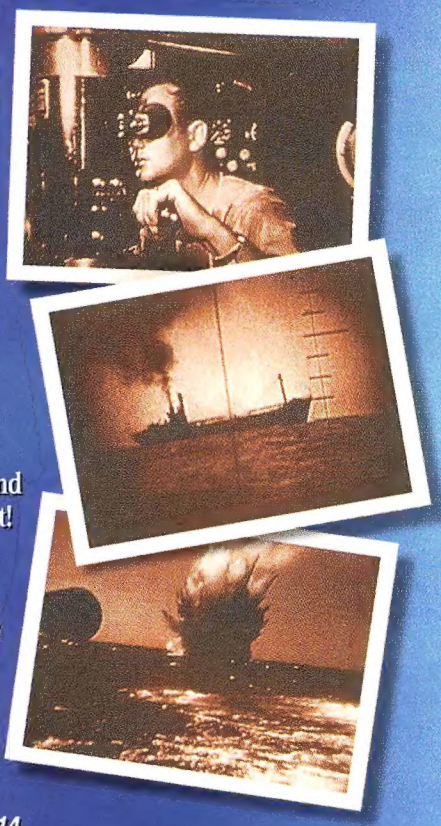

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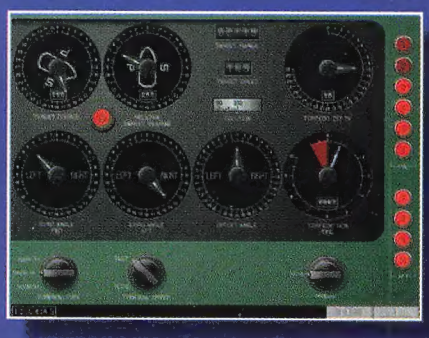

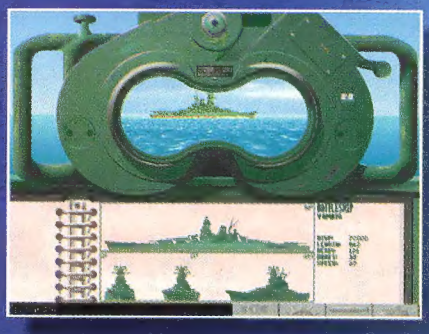

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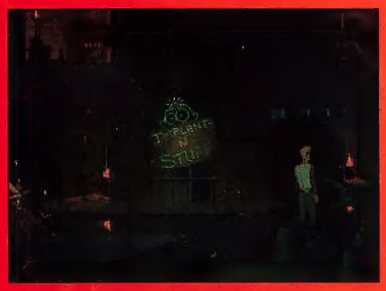

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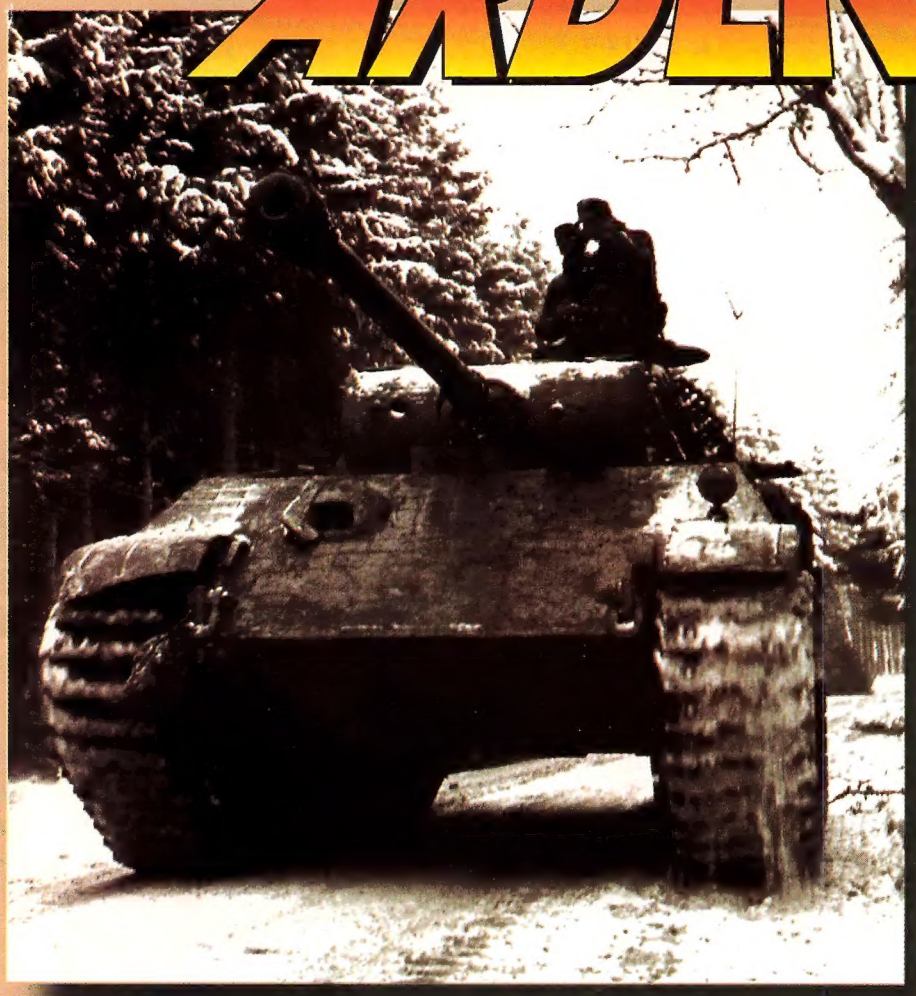

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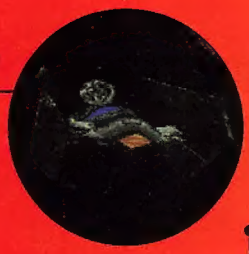

Talk about improvements! Not only have we redesigned the magazine from head-to-toe, inside and out, but we've now created a *Strategy Plus* Demo CD as a bonus! You heard it right. Forget about spending all of your time and hard earned money downloading game demos from the bulletin boards. Many times they're corrupted long before you ever see the credits roll!

Instead, turn to *Strategy Plus* to quench your insatiable gaming appetite.

Each and every month, you can expect to find the latest and greatest selection of fully tested game demos. In fact, many of the demos are interactive, allowing you to play the game over the course of several levels. If that weren't enough though, we will be including the most up-to-the-minute game patches, save games and yes, even custom designed scenarios for many of the most popular games.

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We recommend that you first check the read.me files included within the subdirectory of each game. Each file includes the appropriate technical support hotline in case you do have a problem installing the game. We regret that *Strategy Plus* cannot help you regarding any installation problems. Thanks and enjoy!

Interested parties can obtain this issue's CD-ROM by mailing a check or money order for $3 to cover shipping and handling to: *Strategy Plus, Inc.* P.O. Box 5692, Burlington, VT 05402. Please indicate which demo (indicate issue number) you are requesting. Sorry, no phone orders will be accepted. Defective CD's will be replaced free of charge by mailing only the CD-ROM disk to the address above. Replacements and/or new orders require four to six weeks for delivery.

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New Look

Welcome to the newly-redesigned pages of *Strategy Plus*. We've revamped a number of style issues in the magazine, both to provide a more competitive-looking page to look at and to make information easier to find. The judicious use of color should help highlight different areas of the magazine to make it easier for you to find what you want quickly, without getting in the way of readability. The change in format and font gives the magazine a nicer look, without impacting the content of the pages. A close look will verify that we're still presenting the same amount of information we always have, even with the style changes. Hope you enjoy the new design! Please write us and let us know what you think.

SLIP, PPP, *Mosaic*, *Netscape* – doesn't seem to make any difference. The over-used verb "surf" for internet is now way out of date. "Crawl" and "ooze" come more to mind. With some experience you realize that your main task before logging on is to figure out which Web and internet sites are getting the least traffic, which servers are in time zones where people are mostly asleep. Why? Because otherwise, no matter how fast the connection, internet access – be it via Web interfaces, ftp or even telnet – will turn into a hideous agony of hurry up and wait. Sure, you've got the 28.8 modem (or maybe even an ISDN line), but no matter; what counts for throughput is how busy the server. And for a vast majority of internet servers these days, the answer is, quite busy.

Techniques are being implemented to deal with the problem, such as the "mirroring" of the busiest sites to less busy servers. What this means is that you log onto a popular site, wait five minutes, and then get the instruction to click on some highlighted text (or image) to get to a mirrored location. Fortunately you usually only have to do this once, assuming you then add that new site's address to your address book. Unfortunately, there's only so much mirroring that can go on.

The ultimate issue is whether the server resource to support the traffic can expand and re-allocate fast enough to handle the dramatically increased demand. On the other hand, there are probably those in the traditional (i.e. serious research) internet community who'd like things to come to an almost complete bottleneck halt – get all the bozos off internet so we can get back to some real work, please. The kind of expansion necessary to handle an increasingly commercial traffic would probably mean the kinds of investments and restrictions that would quickly turn internet into – surprise! – the same kind of medium as other major commercially-controlled information sources. With the commercial involvement quickly outweighing internet's traditional strength – providing rapid communication for research professionals globally so they can work together to solve common global scientific and research problems – internet would soon become just More of the Same. Imagine *Walt Disney* dropping into the major research lab for medical DNA research and pre-empting the lab's resources to provide umpteen channels playing *Pocahontas* in place of that research, and you'd have some idea of the consequences, not just for internet but for the purposes internet originally served.

Meanwhile, one of the biggest overheads on internet is the silly application of graphics "inline" images to web sites. The amount of time and resource it takes for graphic logos to be transmitted across internet lines just so a web site can look a little sexier is rather stupendous; a graphically-intensive web site can make an internet communication session feel like the good old days of 300 baud communications ten years ago. And then there's the already heavily-commented-on problem of the "noise to information" ratio. Particularly on many of the sites dedicated to entertainment purposes, particularly in the "discussion" areas, what passes for discussion resembles nothing so much as a shouting match at a soccer game between drunken advocates of different teams, as to which one's better. Such matches will go on endlessly, requiring hours of any participant's monthly download time to wade through (unless you've figured out some useful sifting techniques – we'll hopefully bring you an article on same in an upcoming issue).

Which all leads back, oddly enough, to some of the bigger commercial services as the reasonable alternative to the much-hyped "surf" on internet. Imagine carefully moderated (without being censored) discussion groups; consistently high throughput for binary downloads; few delays, waits, or halts to transmission sessions; simple control over the graphic side of the interface (that's there in the web browsers, too – highly recommended you turn loading inline images off, if you don't want to spend $50/month just for company logos); and, most importantly, thorough and careful sifting through the information available on internet to provide the best of what's out there and to save the user massive amounts of time (and expenditure) finding the best. Imagine *CompuServe*, *Genie*, *America On-Line*, and with any luck (if they run it right), *Microsoft*'s upcoming network.

The commercial networks provide the same kind of service a good, high-quality department store provides; namely, a trained, professional, experienced team whose selectivity about product makes looking for what you want a pleasure instead of a chore. Sure, you can spend three hours sifting through the jumbled pile at the bargain basement bins to find the same thing for a discount, but how much have you really saved, when you count the time you spent, in doing so (depends on how much you value your own time; I value mine very highly).

In the Brave New Info Future, I suspect the commercial on-line networks will prove, if anything, even more of an attraction than they already are. Some may object to the seemingly higher connect costs, but if you consider that cost as payment for the service of wading through internet mess to bring you the best, it suddenly looks like quite a bargain.

Me, I'll leave internet to the researchers, and hope the current fad hyping it for more trivial purposes evolves into something more productive and less time- and money-wasting. Meanwhile, internet e-mail continues to be a useful thing. Then again, writing a letter and putting a 32-cent stamp on it can be a pleasure. Maximizes the info to noise ratio, too.

◆ **Steve Wartofsky, Editor**

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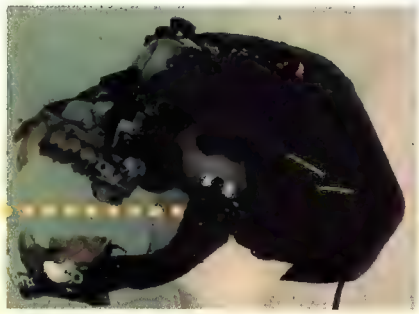
Wing Commander IV



This is what the Kilrathi (Melek) in WC4 would look like if you "skinned the cat." It was created by McGrew Productions and features 27 servos. To give you some indication of what that means, "Amy" the gorilla in the movie Congo had 23

Photos by Todd Hensheil

Tom Wilson (right) tries to intimidate Mark Hamill (left) while the 1st Ass't Director ignores both of them. WC4 is being shot totally on 35mm film.

So what do you do after you make **Wing Commander 3** (**WC3**) – the most successful interactive movie ever made (two demerits if you say "go to Disneyland!")? Why, you make the sequel **Wing Commander 4** (**WC4**), of course! This is exactly what *Origin Systems* and Chris Roberts are doing at *RenMar Studios* in Hollywood, California.

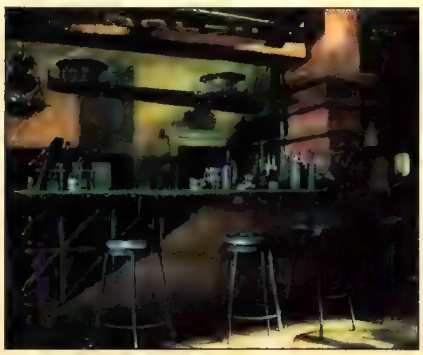
Mark Hamill, Tom Wilson, Malcolm McDowell, John Rhys-Davies, and Jason Bernard all return to reprise their well known characters as Christopher Blair, Maniac, Admiral Tolwyn, Paladin, and Eisen respectively. Set after **WC3**, now that the war with the Kilrathi has been over for about a year, conflicts between the border worlds (where **Privateer** was set) and the core Confederation worlds have been escalating. You, the game player, through your virtual alter ego Christopher Blair, are called back into service to try and stop a civil war.

Although the interface will remain more or less the same as **WC3**, the flight portion of **WC4** has been updated. Of course there are plenty of new ships and weapons, but there are no more cockpits. All flight will be through a HUD (Heads Up Display). Missions are reported to be more interesting, strategic and complex, but the big difference will be in the added control you'll have over your wingmen and other ships during flight.

Just as we finished reporting **The Darkening** as the most expensive interactive title ever produced, we heard that **WC4** – with an estimated budget of $8 million plus – sets a new all-time record. Chris Roberts, who is again directing and executive producing this latest installment of the **WC** saga, explains that the increase in cost over **WC3** is mainly due to the fact that they're using real sets instead of computer generated backgrounds, and shooting 35mm film instead of video. Contrary to the rumors that were floating around earlier in the year, **WC4** will not be simultaneously released as a theatrical feature film. However, **Wing Commander 5** (**WC5** – was there ever a doubt?) is currently slated for this honor. While one reason for shooting 35mm film instead of video is "good practice" for the upcoming **WC5** project, Chris Roberts sites that 35mm film reproduces better on newer machines such as the *Sony* **Playstation** and *Sega* **Saturn**.

WC4 is being shot on real live, honest to goodness Hollywood sets. WC3 was shot "blue screen" and had the background electronically added afterwards.

The PC CD-ROM version is due out by Christmas 95' with a 3DO version to follow. **WC4** will be using the same optimized version of *Origin*'s game engine **TD** is using, one which features a new generation of video compression that allows for improved video playback and camera movements.



One of the bars that you'll frequent in WC4

Space Bucks!

Impressions seems to be on a stellar roll. First we get **Breach 3**, and next up is **Space Bucks!** This new Windows-based game will take the budding entrepreneur into the far reaches of space. Starting with a small cache of cash, players will build ships, acquire landing rights on various planets, and set up cargo and passenger runs. Three computer-controlled players will be out to stop you; in addition, you'll have to defend your ships against space pirates.

The player's role in **Space Bucks!** is that of CEO of a space hauling company, as opposed to being the captain of an individual ship. *Impressions*' goal is to produce a business game that is accessible to a broad range of gamers. They simplify the details somewhat, and ease the burden of dealing with the minutiae of running a company. This decision is laudable; playing many business games feels too much like putting in a day at the office.

The game will feature a ship design module. Players will have the option to outfit their vessels with such things as first-and second-class passenger accommodations, cargo space to facilitate toxic materials, materials requiring a heated environment, or plain and cheap empty cargo space without any special attributes. Of course, the ship will also require weaponry to defend itself, as well as space devoted to fuel, engines, and the like. New technologies for ship components are obtained from the various planets which the player's ships will visit.

Combat will be fairly simple (since, after all, the player is not on the ship, but back in the comfort of a plush office). A ship will send a message that it is about to enter a battlezone, and the player will give the ship's captain instructions such as attack, defend, or get the heck out of Dodge. After that, combat is out of the player's control.

Impressions stresses that this is not a typical "buy low, sell high" game. Rather, it deals with cargo carrying contracts and in general a higher level of commerce than that of the entrepreneurial trader. There will be a stock market to dabble in, and other possible features include various dirty tricks, and the inclusion of black market cargo. All in all, a potentially interesting mix of strategic business play.

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Reader Service No. 102

Urban Decay

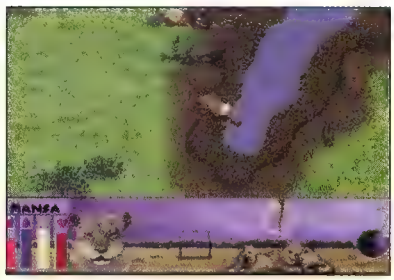
The Balls are Back- Psygnosis revels in Urban Decay

Coming in mid-1996 from the demented mind of Andrew Spencer, the designer of one of the top action-adventures of 1995, **Ecstatica**, is **Urban Decay**. Fans of his previous work will immediately recognize the visual style – yes, the balls are back and better than ever. The ellipsoid technology that Spencer developed is an alternative to polygons, and it gives the games a surreal look that perfectly complements the games surreal design.

Ecstatica was such a visual success due in part to the cohesion of the design – yes, the characters looked weird, but so did everything else. **Urban Decay**, though, features a more difficult battle, because while the first was a fantasy, this is set in a violent US ghetto at night and we all know what *those* look like (unfortunately). However, each character does feature more ellipsoids than **Ecstatica** did, which means that, as the pictures here ably illustrate, the characters look more real than they did in the first game. Also improved are the number of camera angles used throughout the game, with **Urban Decay** showing a ten-fold improvement over its predecessor.

Like the first game, **Urban Decay** will not be for the kiddies. It will feature more gratuitous violence than the first, though they will try and work in some repercussions for excessive killing (in the form of additional confrontations). The plot is being hashed out as you read this, and we'll be sure to report back with any additional information on what will likely be one of the "ones to watch" of 1996.

Lion



The Wolf that Roared?

If originality is the most praiseworthy element of any design in today's cookie-cutter game world, then *Sanctuary Woods'* **Wolf** was the best game of 1994. Wildly original and wonderfully weird, it was the only wildlife simulation/role-playing game we can think of. In it you were able to *be* a wolf and find out what exactly it was that wolves have to do to stay alive. It was perhaps the best learning software that we've ever seen, because unlike most programs, it didn't bash you over the head with facts and rules, but instead played out more like a role-playing game, where you learned things as you went along.

Later this year will see the follow-up to that title, **Lion**, which isn't a kiddie thing like **The Lion King** but a true simulation of what it's like to be a lion. The player will be a lion on the savanna grasslands and wooded plains of the African Serengeti. There are more than 20 lion characters, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. The player will have to learn to use the lion's senses, instincts and physical strength to hunt, survive and protect its family.

The most obvious improvement in the game is the visuals. They are now in high resolution graphics, and there will be more variety to scenery, more diverse prey and predators and better animation. There will be 20 scenarios of varying difficulty and purpose, including tracking herds of zebras, escaping fires, and fighting other lions for leadership of a pride. You can either control a single lion or an entire pride, switching from lion to lion for optimal effectiveness in hunting and tracking.

With improvements in the visual departments and even more in-depth gameplay, one can only hope that **Lion** will not go virtually ignored by the public like **Wolf** was. You want originality? – here it is. You want diverse gameplay? – here it is. Will **Lion** end up king of the software store? We shall see...

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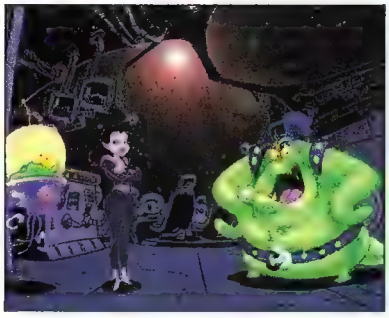
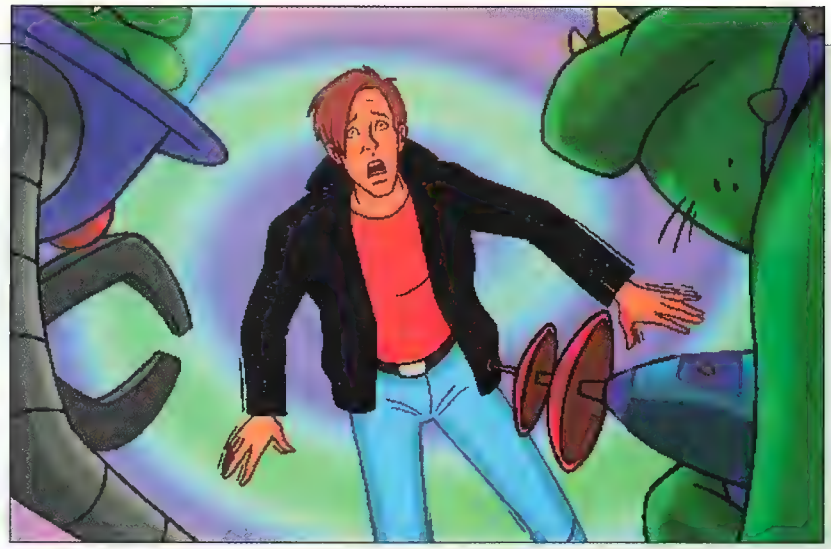
Orion Burger





Sanctuary Woods' Orion Burger to serve up tasty fast food adventure

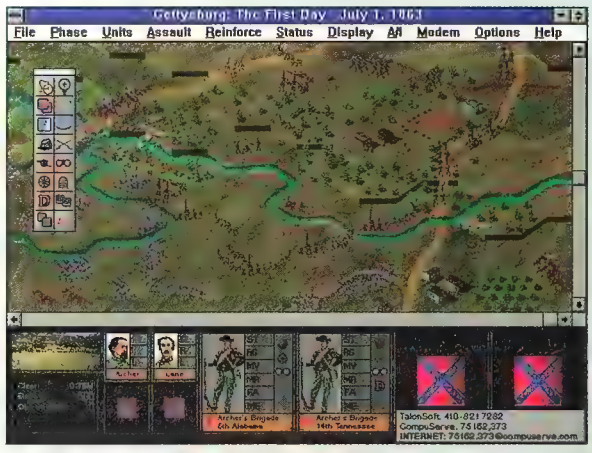
Leave it to the environmentalists and activists to ruin Earth. An alien rights activist group called the *Planet Huggers* has cut a deal with the *Orion Burger* intergalactic chain of friendly fast food for the entire family to prohibit them from farming "intelligent life" for their burgers. Apparently, intelligent life is too scarce a resource to be used as burger meat. A representative of the chain has visited Earth and captured a human to see if he can pass an intelligence test – if he passes, they will leave humans alone. If he fails than humans get to really experience what it's like to be a cow.

So goes the basic plot of *Sanctuary Woods* upcoming adventure **Orion Burger**, an animated cartoon comedy adventure featuring stunning graphics that could give *LucasArts* something to shoot for. The player controls Wilbur, the human specimen who has to determine the fate of the human race. The alien intelligence tests range from measuring the conductiveness of his brain (or his "neuro-synaptic bandwidth") to his language skills (learn an alien tongue). To make this weird premise weirder, you have one advantage. In an homage to *Groundhog Day* you get to relive the day of your abduction over and over again until you get it right.

Populating the world will be a number of weird aliens, including Zlarg, who has a belly-mounted wheel for propulsion; Flumix, who resembles a gumball; and Astral, a *Planet Hugger* spy. Be on the lookout for other humans, including hillbillies, rednecks, rocks, punks, and perhaps the worst of the bunch – mutant gerbils (we're not even sure we want to know what their role in the story is).

With **Orion Burger** following hot on the heels of **The Riddle of Master Lu**, it's quite clear that *Sanctuary Woods* is serious about adventure gaming. With exceptional animation, high-resolution cartoon graphics and a story that enters new realms of the bizarre, **Orion Burger** may let gamers have it their own way and become **Burger** kings (*we apologize for this last sentence and promise never to use fast food metaphors again*).

Battleground: Gettysburg



Hot on the heels of *TalonSoft*'s **Battleground: Ardennes** comes **Battleground: Gettysburg**. This game, using the same basic engine of **Ardennes**, covers all three days of what is perhaps the Civil War's most famous battle. Players can choose from playing a campaign covering the whole battle, or shorter scenarios covering each day or selected parts of the battle.

TalonSoft has striven for accuracy, both in game play and in details. For instance, on-screen unit representations will have historically accurate uniforms, and leaders will be represented by busts of the actual commanders who were there. *TalonSoft* believes that including historical accuracy doesn't prohibit creating a game which is easy to play; their intention is to provide an experience which is accessible to beginning wargamers, yet still satisfying for the old grognards out there.

In a nod to the multimedia fans, video clips and sound bites will add to the atmosphere, but are kept short enough to ensure that they won't affect the flow of the game. We realize that "serious" wargamers scoff at graphics, but heck, we still like icing on our birthday cake (as long as there is plenty of substance underneath).

Players will have the option of taking command of the whole army, or limiting their responsibility to a single corps (in which case the computer takes on the role of overall commander). Command and control problems will be modeled in that a player's orders may not be properly followed, dependent on the skills of subordinate leaders as well as the quality of troops (there will also be an option to make all leaders have uniform abilities to simplify gameplay). As battles rage, the battleground will fill with smoke, adding literally to the fog of war (smoke blocks line of sight in the design).

TalonSoft was showing an early version of **Battleground: Gettysburg** at *Origins* (see this month's *Command Post* for details on that event); all reports indicate the crowds were quite taken with it. Expect to see a more in-depth preview in a near future issue of *Strategy Plus*.

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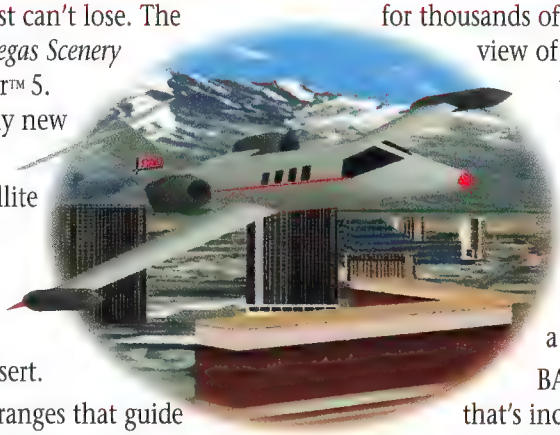

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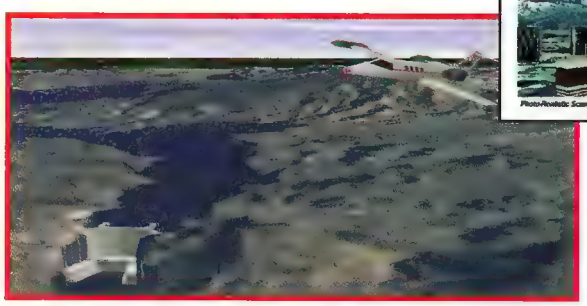

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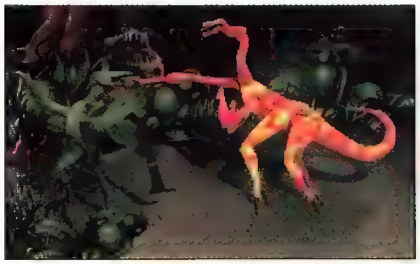
Xenophage



Riddle me this: What genre of games caters to a highly concentrated niche of die-hard fans, while the content involves two characters, primarily two different actions, and more secrets than the Colonel's secret recipe? Known as the kick-punch genre to the masses, but more liberally referred to as the fighting genre, games like **Mortal Kombat** and **Street Fighter** are practically the same core engine, with some added spices and visual stimuli. *Apogee's* latest limb-crusher **XenoPhage** won't win any citations for dramatically changing the spectacle of fighting games, but it does offer its share of unique features, along with the obligatory stash of gore and violence.

Unlike *GTE* and *Argonaut's* **FX Fighter**, *Apogee's* "E.T." is only two dimensional, although the backgrounds do scroll and zoom with the action. What results is a more visually stunning game than *Epic's* **One Must Fall**, partially due to the fact that the character drawings are extremely large. For example, most of the characters take up three-quarters of the screen and looking amazingly realistic, an effect of their being rendered in 3D. **XenoPhage's** ensemble cast includes eleven contenders with eight aliens, two humans, and what's referred to as "one nasty surprise."

Unquestionably the "Ready... Fight" format of gameplay is at the core of **XenoPhage**. To achieve success in this currently competitive genre, the creators must deliver extremely responsive action and a host of perilous challenges to keep our thumbs numb and our brains surging with excitement.

Although **XenoPhage** is not a gigantic technological leap forward in the genre, if it can deliver on its promise of revolutionary game design, it may indeed knock fighting fans into another universe of apocalyptic action.

Shadow Warrior

Lurking mountains, intense magic and ominous mystery will converge later this year when *3D Realms Entertainment* unleashes their latest beast, **Shadow Warrior**. Using the highly publicized *Build* engine developed internally by the company, this 3D adventure tries to crack into the same terrain once occupied by *id's* mystical **Heretic**, released almost a year ago.

The banal concept of "the world's in trouble and you're the missing link to saving humanity" is, not surprisingly, the gist of the plot for **Shadow Warrior.** *3D Realms* spices it up with some superlative plot dressing, including an evil spirit released from under Mt. Fuji; let's just hope that the devil's name isn't Kodak. This menacing commander begins to control the hordes of troops on the ground in a fierce scheme to overthrow first Japan, then the world. Even though the plot is more predictable than your average Hardy Boys novel, action games aren't exactly heralded for their literary vigor.

Rather, the budget has gone towards more important departments such as graphics, sound, and most noticeably, game design. With a design that is in the same vein as **DOOM**, there's no question this effort will be benchmarked against the previous genre king, but notwithstanding, **Shadow Warrior** does feature some innovative game design. Martial arts and a very oriental flavor adorn the game, and the majority of foes are some variation of Ninja.

In actuality there are three different classes of Ninjas, from the low level apprentice to the master assassin. The artificial intelligence for the enemies is a cut above **DOOM's** "zigzag and shoot" etiquette, as your adversaries can climb ladders, duck, swim, jump and even steal weapons from the ground. Much to the despair of some players, the game will actually be fair to enemies this time around!

The architecture and cunning art design are truly staggering, especially in Super VGA. Gigantic statues are littered throughout the levels, along with atmospheric touches including emblems, banners, and extraordinary trees. The art-deco in **Shadow Warrior** looks to be one of its strong points, along with a highly interactive environment. For instance, certain levels actually allow you to swim underwater into a coral reef complete with fish and sharks. After swimming back up to the surface, you'll notice extremely realistic wave effects, rivaling those in *Dynamix's* **Aces of the Deep**.

High on the grotesque scale, players will be able to actually use body parts of perished enemies as weapons (brings back fond memories of the arm in **Bioforge**, eh?). Hinting at the mystical nature of this title, you can rip out the heart of a character known as the "Ripper," and use that as a weapon which shoots fireballs. No doubt this feature will send action gamers to heaven, and everyone else into uproar over the content. Besides being fully multiplayer compliant, it looks as if **Shadow Warrior** will carve a gory, successful niche in the 3D realm of entertainment given its enchanting visuals and cunning gameplay. As it stands, **Shadow Warrior** looks to be a brilliant panoply of samurais and swords, anchored in mystical gameplay and greasy gore.

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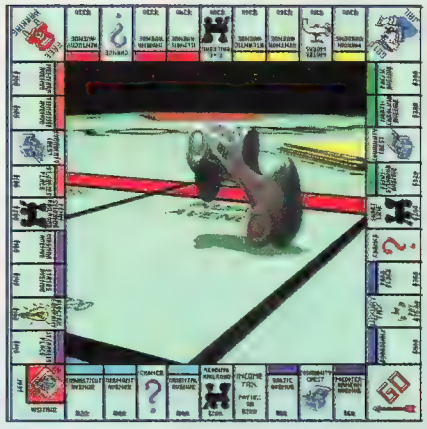
Monopoly



Parker Brothers' classic goes hi-tech on the Internet

When we heard that *Westwood Studios* was working on a 3D version of **Monopoly**, we greeted the news with a "huh?" While we love a good game of **Monopoly** as much as the next person, we felt we'd rather see *Westwood* working on more titles along the lines of **Command & Conquer** and **Lands of Lore II**.

OK, so we were wrong. *Westwood* **is** working on another ultra-cool title, and **Monopoly** is it. Sure, it has all of the graphic splendor that we've come to expect from *Westwood*. We're told it'll have over 400 different animations. The music is great (we slipped into the studio and heard a sample of it back when we were visiting to preview **Command & Conquer**) and fits the subject perfectly, having something of a ragtime theme to it. So yes, **Monopoly** will have tons of multimedia glitz. But hey, we're *gamers* here. We can't be charmed by just another pretty face.

No, what caught our attention was the gameplay. Yes, this is **Monopoly**, and anyone who has played the board version (is there anyone who hasn't?) will be able to jump right into it. What we really liked, though, were the options to start a game using different sets of rule variations. All of the generally popular variations should be available (y'know, all fines go into Free Parking...that sort of thing). Cheating will also be allowed.

And now, for the kicker. Playing **Monopoly** with up to five computer opponents is an OK way to pass some time, but to really get into it you need some humans to humble. And you've got it. Modem and network play are supported, even over the Internet. *Westwood* has included three different languages (German, French and English), with the game handling all translations and monetary conversions for you. (Did we mention that the game offers different property sets, cued to your part of the world?)

Of course, we can't always be on-line. In that case, you can load up some of the computer talent to play against. The really nifty point here is that the computer AI comes in a straight text file and can be edited by the player. The current plan is for *Westwood* to use their web site for AI tournaments and as a meeting room for **Monopoly**-heads.

This isn't *just* **Monopoly** – this looks as if it will be the mother of all **Monopoly** games. You can wow your non-gaming friends with all the eye and ear candy, challenge your cyber-buddies to an on-line tournament, or take on that definitive AI you snagged off the net. Bring it on, *Westwood*. We're ready to advance to Go.

Depending on your moves, she'll crush you or exalt you.

All your twisted dreams of power.
Granted.

All your schizo-paranoiac fantasies.
Free rein.

All your enemies, and all their enemies, and so on and so on and so on.
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Reader Service No. 111

Wooden Ships & Iron Men

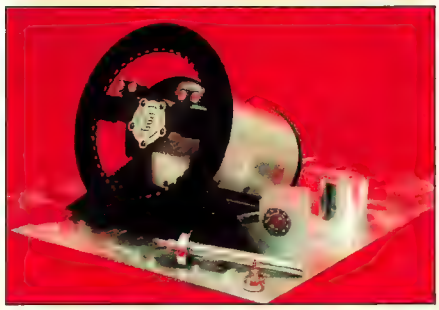
Stanley Associates is working on the conversion of **Wooden Ships & Iron Men** for *Avalon Hill*. Players get to take command of American, British, French or Spanish warships in the grand days of cannon fire and canvas sail. Features include SVGA graphics, the choice of single ship or fleet engagements, and both 2D and 3D viewing perspectives.

Nelson wannabes can play against the computer or take on a human opponent via "hot seat" or email. Historical scenarios will be included, as well as a three month Atlantic patrol campaign. Custom scenarios can be created with the included scenario editor.

Games covering Revolutionary and Napoleonic naval warfare have been few and far between, and we suspect we're not alone in our eager anticipation of this title. The board version of **Wooden Ships & Iron Men** is arguably the most popular game covering the period (we also enjoyed *SPI*'s **Frigate** an awful lot), so the source material is solid. *Stanley Assoicates* and *Avalon Hill* seem committed to creating an equally solid computer version. More on as the game draws nearer to completion.

In Brief

...Despite what our preview last month may have implied *The Logic Factory* will be releasing **Ascendancy** with distribution by *Broderbund*...In the **Pax Imperia 2** preview in issue 58, we decided to change the publisher's name from *Blizzard Entertainment* to *Blizzard Software*...Rumors abound about something called **Civ2000** in development somewhere – you figure it out...*IntraCorp* will be releasing **V for Victory II**, **Crystal Skull** and **Hammer Slammers**...*Trilobyte* will be releasing their next batch of games under their own name, including **Dog Eat Dog** and **Clandestiny**... **MechWarrior 2** will be *Activision*'s last DOS product - it's Windows only from now on...*Interactive Magic*'s next strategy game will be called **Capitalism**...



Competition Driving System

Extreme Competition Controls
Tel: (612) 824-6733

As any knowledgeable racing fan will attest, winning results on Sunday afternoon may well have as much, or more, to do with the equipment under the driver than the driver himself. And so it is becoming in the world of PC racing.

Minnesota's *Extreme Competition Controls* have just entered the suddenly crowded field of purpose-built racing control devices, and ohhh baby, what an entrance. The **Competition Driving System** is the product, and it does for the computer driver what graphite rackets did for tennis players - namely, make them a whole lot better.

That's quite a claim, yet in testing, the **CDS** consistently terminated the competition in all three of the genre's top simulations (**NASCAR Racing, World Circuit and IndyCar Racing**), and did it better than any wheel, yoke or joystick that's ever come across this desk. Through the tight streets of Monaco, the skinny pavement of Nazareth, and the brake-happy Martinsville oval, the unwavering steady drive and response of the **CDS** simply has no current peer.

It's a two part "system," made up of separate wheel and pedal units. Together they work in harmony as a natural extension to the driver and take very little acclimitization, but the star of the show surely must be the steering unit. Featuring a comfortably thick three-spoked 11" custom fabricated steel frame wheel wrapped in black suede, the entire assembly weighs 14 lbs. and remains stationary without a clamping device – a good start. The wheel itself protrudes from the end of an angled, adjustable brushed steel cylinder base, and features noiseless action, graduated resistance near the ends of its 180 degree throw and a notchless centre. It's beefy to be sure, and as an added bonus, the thing looks just too cool for words.

Mounted to the wheel are four small-ish front-facing thumbswitches (two for each thumb) that, if the system is used with a dual joystick port, can be set for any function that program supports. Without a dual port, one button on each side will be rendered useless. I set one right hand button for upshifting, one left hand button for downshifting, and found their positioning to be quite accomodating even in the fires of battle.

The **CDS** pedal unit is a little less exciting in description, essentially a big black metal wedge with two metal pedals protruding from the tall end, but hey, who said pedals had to be exciting to do their job. What's important is that they're built for driving *only*, with a small throw, "heavier" brake, and none of that annnoying fore/aft movement of multi-purpose pedals.

The **Competition Driving System** begs you to "assume the position" – lower that chair, straighten those legs under the desk, angle the wheel flat and drive. Your first stop may be the bank as the **CDS** doesn't come cheap, but if money is no object on the road to driving Nirvana, get moving.

ThrustMaster TQS

ThrustMaster
Tel: (503) 639-3200

The long awaited release of the *Thrustmaster* **TQS** (Throttle Quadrant System) has arrived. Modeled after the actual throttle quadrant in the General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon, the **TQS** is the companion for the highly regarded F-16 **FLCS** (FLight Control System), also from *Thrustmaster*. While the **FLCS** can operate on its own or with a **WC2** (Weapons Control System 2), the **TQS** requires an **FLCS** with the latest chip to operate (more on this in a moment).

If you're not familiar with the **FLCS**, it's a state of the art joystick that features almost unlimited function programming of its 4 buttons, 4 four-way hat switches, and 1 double-detent trigger. The **TQS** adds realistic throttle control, 2 two-way switches, 2 dials, 1 four-way switch, 1 push button, and a trackball (which can be configured as *Microsoft* or *Logitech* mouse) for a true HOTAS (Hands On Throttle and Stick) setup.

The **TQS** is made from sturdy, matte-textured plastic and has a solid heft, something which will satisfy critics who feel other sticks are too lightweight. Since most of the controls of the **TQS** are found on one end of the handle, it accommodates both big hands and small hands; there is no need to stretch to reach for things.

Although the names of the switches and knobs on the **TQS** are named after the real life functions in the actual F-16, each (including the throttle and trackball) can be programmed to suit your needs. Since it would be impossible to condense the **FLCS** and **TQS** manuals to fit this review, I'll just say that you can program functions as single or multiple key presses, toggles, and as analog or digital devices just to name a few.

Programming of the **TQS/FLCS** is handled through the included DOS utilities. *Thrustmaster* has also included configuration files for over 36 popular flight sims and games. You can create and/or edit your own using these utilities, or with one of the third party or shareware programs.

To find out if your **FLCS** has the newer chip, download CHIPCHECK from http://www.thrustmaster.com or try the following:

1. Place the DOWNLOAD/RUN switch in DOWNLOAD and leave it there. DO NOT RETURN IT TO RUN and do not hit enter.
2. Press and release BTN S1, if:
   a. The cursor jumps to the next line - you need the new chip for your FLCS
   b. The cursor backs up and eats the last character - you already have the new chip.

Remember to do the RUN, BTN S1 thing to wake the FLCS up again when you're finished. The new chip can be requested directly from *THRUSTMASTER*.

If you have an **FLCS** and you require throttle control and/or more functions, the **TQS** is the perfect choice. It's a reasonably priced, well designed, solid product backed by *Thrustmaster*'s fantastic customer service. Check one out. If you're serious about flight sims and air combat sims in particular, I think you'll like what you see and feel.

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-PC Gamer

"A must have for real and virtual pilots alike."
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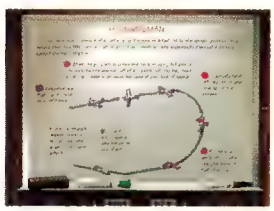

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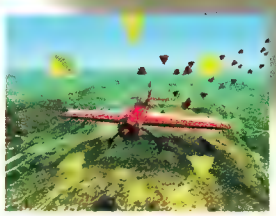

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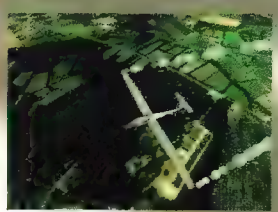

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–Mike Goulian
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486 DX-66 or higher recommended. MS DOS 5.0 or higher, 8 MB RAM and CD ROM required. Multiple SVGA modes and customizable display options for optimal performance. Full support for a variety of peripherals including control yokes, joysticks, rudder pedals and VR headsets.

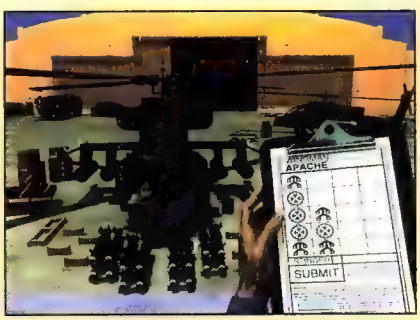
Jane's Enter Simulation Arena

Electronic Arts and Origin Systems team-up with the premier publisher of declassified military intelligence to bring gamers the next generation of flight simulators, Origin's AH-64D Longbow and EA's Super Fighters

The big news from *Electronic Arts* and *Origin* this month is that they're now collaborating with *Jane's*, the publishers of *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*, the definitive commercial encyclopedia for de-classified information on air combat hardware (*Jane's* also covers all other aspects of military hardware, as well as military geopolitical issues, and is historically known to be a reliable, objective source for such information).

What does this give Paul Grace, Brent Iverson, Andy Hollis and the other simulation designers working with *EA* and *Origin* on the companies' next-generation sims? Well, not only will these people have the most up-to-date database of accurate information on the technology they're simulating (others can obtain the same simply by purchasing the publications), but they'll also have the *input* of those working with *Jane*'s into design issues as well. Further, *Jane*'s will probably be able to arrange military resources for the designers which are difficult for most other publishers to have access to (this includes such things as real technology demonstrations as well as technical experts' analyses). Most importantly, however, *Jane's* will have their own imprint on the upcoming work from *EA/Origin*, which means their own committment to insuring that the representation of military issues and technology offered has the same level of detail and accuracy the company has built its historic reputation on. Finally, *Jane's* will no doubt provide professional analytical resources who're engaged seriously with the question of doing real air combat (and other?) simulation.

It's kinda like the difference between *Queen* hiring the London Symphony Orchestra to do a few strings tracks for the background on an upcoming CD and Elvis Costello working seriously with a classical string quartet to produce some innovative new music. In the latter case, everyone's equally committed to doing real work.



This is the way they do it in real life, too

Origin's chopper simulation – an "interactive documentary?"

The first two releases upcoming from this collaboration will be *Origin*'s **Apache AH-64D Longbow** and *EA*'s **Super Fighters** (working title). We'll start with the former, Andy Hollis' pet project.

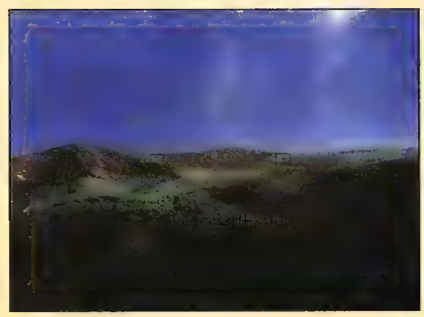
Those are Andy Hollis' own words, in describing the difference between **A-H64D Longbow** and *Origin*'s previous simulation efforts (**Strike Commander**, **Pacific Strike** and **Wings of Glory**). Whereas those efforts sustained the adventure-style approach to simulation *Origin* succeeded with in their role-playing and space combat games, what we'll see here is total dedication to putting the player into a serious representation of the environment of actual recent military campaigns. With Operation Desert Storm and Operation Just Cause (Panama, anybody remember?) as the theatre bases for the campaign mode, players will be put through as realistic a process of preparation for and then engagement in real-world helicopter battle as has ever shown in a simulation.

Preparation is, oddly enough, one of the potentially most interesting aspects of **AH-64D**'s design. In some ways like **Flight Unlimited**'s aerobatic training mode, the training procedures in **AH-64D** will provide the computer equivalent of an instructor present to do the actual training. Unlike **Flight Unlimited**, however, which basically outlines the parameters of a particular maneuver and then asks the player to perform it, **AH** gives the player – for the first time in any kind of simulation – real-time feedback on player action. The real AH64 instructor called onboard to work through this instruction will actually offer encouragement and criticism *as the player attempts each action*, making training the equivalent of having a veteran simulation player perched on your shoulder helping you learn what to do. For people who've gone glassy-eyed after looking at a serious simulation's manual for ten minutes, this will probably be *the* ideal solution to the steep learning curve issue which has always plagued the genre. For those veterans of the genre who're tired of taking weeks to re-learn keystroke or even *TQS/FLCS* button assignments, again, this approach to instruction will get things up and running in a quick, interesting way. Most importantly for designers who've poured massive energy into details in a simulation, such training will also help players learn to *notice* and *use* those details, instead of staying stuck in "fly it around like an arcade game" mode until they get bored.

The rest of it? 2500 square kilometres for each of the 9 bases of operation present in the design – just the right size for chopper missions. Massive *Origin* resources – on a scale rivaling those for **Wing Commander IV** – dedicated to providing cutting-edge graphics and 3D modeling. Andy Hollis working out the flight and control realism (need more be said?). *Jane*'s as the source for mission design (really, need more be said there, either?).

Oh – which reminds us – missions in **AH-64D** will be tree-based. The explanation is that, by hand-crafting the parameters for each mission, the designers can insure the best balance (and realism) for the experience of the mission, instead of leaving it up to the potential oddities a dynamic mission generating engine could produce (which isn't to say *Origin* might not move towards a computer mission generator in the future). There'll be many more branches than we've seen from *Origin* in the past, though, so no fear about being locked into limited play. Even more, in single mission mode the player can generate a wide variety of randomized missions, with control over weather, time of day and other parameters to tune the limits of the randomizer.

And which leads to the last important techno-point on **AH-64D**: all possible peripherals will be supported (imagine *virtual i-o* doing



Note the advanced terrain graphics

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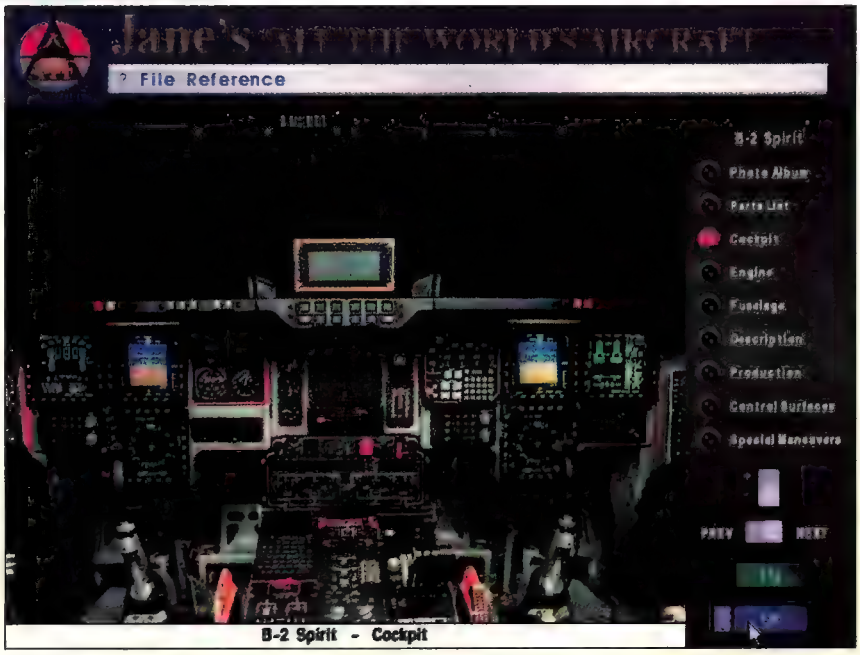


***Jane's* gives players full cockpit photo-realism**

the TADS display! well, we can hope, at least), and control over graphics, realism and flight control linkages will be quite detailed. Players will be able to dial in or out those effects or factors which might interfere with their enjoyment of the process.

All in all, **AH-64D** looks like *the* Christmas cutting-edge tech air combat release to go for. Stay tuned.

EA's simulation pushes US Navy Fighters to the limit

Whatever there might be to gripe about in **US Navy Fighters** (graphics is too next generation, certain peripherals are not supported, cockpits are too generalized), the fact remains that it's one of the most enjoyable simulations currently available. People who don't even normally pay a lot of attention to the genre have gotten into air combat sims with this one, including some with plenty of real-world flight (and combat) experience.

Some of this has to do with the ground-breaking approach to sound in the design. The Guy in Back responds to your input. Try pulling some really severe maneuvers and you'll hear what I mean. Plenty of amusing surprises on that score.

But a lot of it also has to do with the way the team of Paul Grace and Brent Iverson have continued to approach simulation design. The goal is to provide the elements in the design which will offer the best balance between cutting-edge graphics and animation design, cutting-edge simulation work, and effective visual and control interface.

All simulations have to work out some variation of that balance; the strength of the **USNF** engine is that it really gets it right in the gameplay department, even if other areas of the design (really less significant after the first ten minutes of fussing) need improvement. For that reason alone, more should be done with the **USNF** engine.

More *is* being done. the **Marine Fighters** add-on to **US Navy Fighters** not only provides another campaign, a new set of planes and types of mission, but also gives players a glimpse of where Grace and Iverson are taking the system (details in this month's Hangar).

MF is an add-on, but **Super Fighters** (working title) is a whole new design, based primarily upon the core **USNF** engine. **Super Fighters** provides some solid fine-tuning of the **USNF** system, but more importantly, extends the scope of the design far beyond where it's previously gone.

For fans of the series, the most interesting news is the fact that **Super Fighters** provides a study of a number of areas of real-world futuristic air combat experimentation. The included experimental aircraft – the X-31, the B2, the F-117A, the EF2000, the FX29 – give players a taste of a range of the new technologies only partially presented in the current list of 20th-century air combat sims.

In particular, the X-31 is interesting for its modeling of what's called "post-stall" maneuvering – i.e. the ability to do maneuvers well below the stall limits traditionally typical of modern aircraft. Significant post-stall maneuvering allows for closer-in combat in both air-air and air-ground roles, and is probably *the* major goal of the next generation of fighter design.

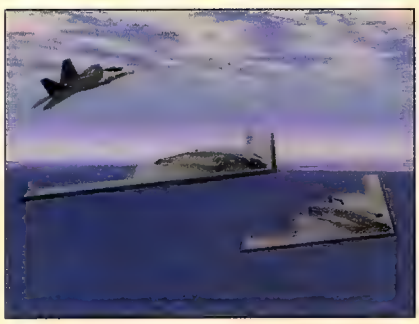
VSTOL, stealth and other cutting-edge performance technologies will also be showcased in **Super Fighters**, not only in the simulation itself but (and this is true for both products) also in the full integration of a *Jane's*-level multimedia source into the design. Instead of having to bop out and back between multimedia and simulation, you'll have quick and immediate access to a full, massive and accurate database of information *while still in the simulation*. No, you won't be able to keep the mission running real-time while you open to page 2042 to read up on the MiG-31 that's inbound, but it'll be almost that good.

Grace and Iverson's system continues to provide some of the most beautifully-modeled 3d objects on the planet, regardless of genre, esp. for air combat sims. The planes here have detail like nothing else out there, and will make **Super Fighters** a pure pleasure to fly for that reason alone.

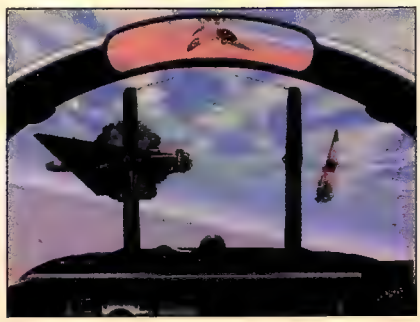
Sound technology continues to advance to give player the kind of plausible aural environment which has been the persistent strength of the design. Aural feedback which contributes to situational awareness is even better in the **Super Fighters** incarnation of this system, and contributes to the (sometimes amusing) realism of the real-time environment.

SF will 3 separate campaigns, not just the 1 included in the original **USNF**. This means 120 new missions in all.

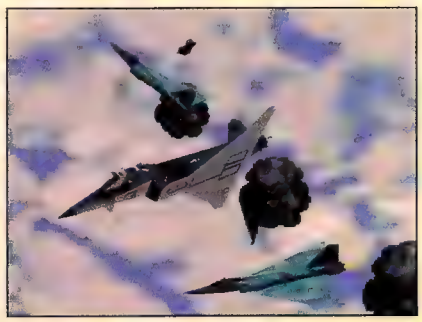
With **AH-64D** and **Super Fighters**, *EA*, *Origin* and *Jane's* are likely to cut a wide swathe in the simulation genre come this winter. Serious air combat fans, rejoice!



A couple of B-2s in action



Planes will break apart, not just explode



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Reader Service No. 41

Can Windows 95 Come Out and Play?

Look over your shoulder. Quick! That speck in the distance is *Microsoft's* Windows 95™, and it's picking up speed like the French Bullet Train on an express run from Paris to Marseilles. August 24 heralds the introduction of one of the world's most touted new software products. By all preliminary reports, Windows 95 will make using PCs easier, offer superb graphics and audio capabilities, simplify the installation of new hardware and software, give us World Peace, and eliminate DOS. Whoops, scratch those last two – that's another article I'm working on.

So, how much of this Windows 95 hoopla is true? What will Windows 95 really do for you? And most importantly, what will it do to that $5000 library of DOS-based high-end graphics games, Virtual Reality headset, and 3-D surround sound setup you just mortgaged your house to buy? The good news is that Windows 95 lives up to its claims, and then some.

What you will see from Windows 95 games is better graphics, easy connectivity (for multiplayer games), high-fidelity sound, and improved gaming performance. According to *Microsoft*, Windows 95 "is expected to greatly improve PC game response speed, graphics performance, and multimedia functionality, bringing PC game performance up to par with TV console games."

What Windows 95 Gives Game Developers

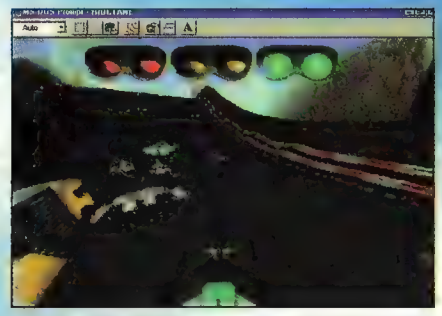
The best PC-based games produced today run under DOS, not Windows. That's a hassle for most of us, because we work in Windows and not DOS. So why don't developers write games for the Windows environment? Well, they do, but the resources required by games like **Falcon 3.0**, **NASCAR Racing**, and **MechWarrior** preclude running through previous versions of Windows.

Besides that, DOS, for all its limitations, is a tried and true development environment. Libraries of DOS routines and drivers already exist, so interfacing games with hardware is standardized, quick, and relatively easy. Under Windows each developer must write their own library routines and drivers. Consequently, Windows-based games cost more to produce and take longer to show up on store shelves.

Enter Windows 95 with its built-in capabilities. Add the recently-announced *Microsoft* Games SDK and you have an OS platform that game developers can, and want to, work with. Says Kevin Bachus of *Mindscape*," [Windows 95] brings us back to parity, back to what we had in DOS. It abstracts us from having to know the exact addresses and DMA and so forth for specific hardware. All that stuff is taken care of when Windows 95 loads."

Because games account for more than 30% of all PC applications sold today and continue to drive

Let The Games Begin...



Hover

World Circuit

Figuring that not everyone in the world has had the free cash to climb the ladder to Pentium-land yet, the games listed here were tested on a 486DX2-66 with 8 MB of RAM and a 4 MB VRAM ISA bus ATI Graphics Pro Turbo display card. The preceding table shows how the games fared under Windows 95.

Game	Mfg.	Execution Mode	Minimize?	Comments
Aces Over Europe	Dynamix	Windows 95, non-windowed	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
Descent	Raven Software	Windows 95, non-windowed	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
Doom	id Software	Windows 95, non-windowed	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
Falcon Gold	Spectrum Holobyte	Windows 95, non-windowed	Yes	Under Windows 95, digitized speech is unintelligible and slows the game. Either turn off digitized speech or run in MS-DOS only mode.
Flight Simulator 5.1	Microsoft	Windows 95	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
Heretic	Id Software	Windows 95, non-windowed	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
Hi-Octane	Bullfrog	Windws 95, windowed or non-windowed	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes. Running it in a window produces glacial frame rates
IndyCar Racing	Papyrus	—	—	Game would not run in any mode, or from the command line prompt. Produced a divide overflow error.
NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	MS-DOS Only	Yes	Create a separate configuration for NASCAR, loading any necessary protected-mode drivers into low memory.
Shanghai: Great Moments	Activision	Windows 95	Yes	Despite what the documentation may say, this game seems to work fine.
Take A Break! Pinball	Dynamix	Windows 95	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
Tetris Gold	Spectrum HoloByte	Windows 95	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
Wolfenstein 3-D	id Software	MS-DOS Only	No	No special requirements, configurations, or notes.
World Circuit	Microprose	Windows 95, non-windowed	Yes	No special requirements, configurations, or notes

the home PC software market, *Microsoft* is investing loads of time and energy in the tools needed to exploit Windows 95 and get games to market. Windows 95 will give developers the tools, software libraries, and support they need to move the PC gaming platform into a realm that matches the best TV game consoles. By unanimous decision (of people I talked to, anyway) the greatest advantages of Windows 95 are its 32-bit capability and that it is a true operating system, not a layer sitting on top of an operating system. Other attributes that hardware and software developers praised are its smoothness, support integration, and speed.

In addition Windows 95 provides: an enriched Windows Games Development Environment (WinG); built-in plug-and-play capabilities; CD AutoPlay, which automatically detects a CD in the player and launches the appropriate application, and Enhanced CD, which lets developers mix code and sound; Surround Video, which allows interaction with objects, images, and live-action video within 360-degree photorealistic scenery [which sounds similar to *Apple's QuickTime VR*]; Display Control Interface (DCI), which is a driver-level interface that lets Windows take full advantage of hardware accelerated graphics cards; and the list goes on. The Games Software Development Kit (SDK) includes such features as DirectDraw, DirectSound, DirectPlay, and DirectInput. These capabilities allow developers to produce 3-D sound and video, and input devices such as digital joysticks (*Microsoft* is already working on one), and to easily connect multiple players.

And don't think that *Microsoft* is ignoring the hardware developers in the process. "Windows 95 is a change for us," said Linden Rhoads, President and co-founder of *Virtual i-O, Inc.* "Getting the support for **Virtual i-glasses** has been difficult until now because of the development time factor. With Windows 95, developers will find device support built right into the API. We won't have to do something special for each game anymore."

That's Great, But What About My DOS Games?

I knew you'd get back to that before too long. Because the best action and simulation games still run under DOS, we all have a vested interest in how *Microsoft* has provided for these games in Windows 95 and how well the games operate. Existing Windows games run under Windows 95 with no hesitation, and this is not an issue.

Windows 95 allows you to run DOS programs in several ways: as a standard Windows 95 program; as a non-windowed program; and as a DOS-mode only program. So far I've found only one game and one application that wouldn't run in at least one of these modes - *Papyrus's* **IndyCar Racing** and *Spectrum Holobyte's* **Art Of The Kill**. I never did succeed in getting either of these programs to run properly.

When you run a DOS program as a standard Windows 95 application the program executes from within a window, allowing you to minimize the window and giving you full access to all Windows 95 capabilities – a critical factor when you're trying out one of these games at work. Not many DOS games will operate here, and that's because of the windowing. Most DOS games require a full screen and dedication of graphics resources.

Non-windowed programs run under Windows 95, but execute in a full-screen mode – you can't display anything else simultaneously. You can, however, minimize the game and access all Windows 95 functions, just as if you are running a Windows program. In some cases you may get a message like that shown in Figure 1 when you minimize the game, but everything works fine and you'll only see the message the first time you minimize the game. Almost all games I tested for this article could run in this mode, if they didn't already run as a Windows program.

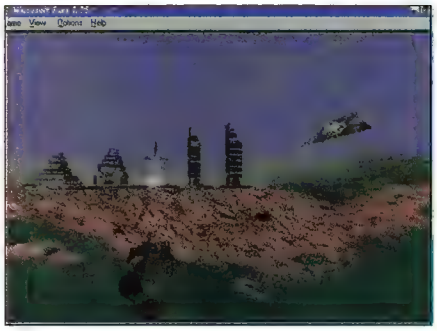
MS-DOS Only mode, also known as Single Application Mode or SAM, dedicates all system resources to the executing game. You can start the game in windows, but the system shuts down all other applications. This is the same as running the program from the command line, with no TSRs or other programs running. Basically, if you start a game in MS-DOS only mode, make sure you save your data by closing the programs first.

Well, now that we're through all the technical garbage (that's pronounced gah-bahge – a French technical term), let's see what flies and what doesn't.

And What's New?

With August 24 fast approaching, several developers have indicated that they will have Windows 95-specific games ready to ship with, or shortly after, Windows 95. Here's a brief look at one of them.

Microsoft - Fury^3



Fury^3 is *Microsoft's* first foray into the action-adventure realm, and a good effort it is. **Fury^3** offers six degrees freedom of movement and the unique capability to let the pilot view action from all angles, independent of spacecraft movement. The game includes four levels of play, realistic 3-D scenery and radar scope, SVGA 256 color, and special graphics.

Strictly speaking, **Fury^3** is not a Windows 95-specific game, as it is backward compatible with Windows 3.1. However, many of the features in **Fury^3** come from the WinG game developers environment. The game will require a minimum of a 486DX2-66 with 8MB of RAM, multimedia capabilities, and a CD-ROM drive.

Well, there you have it. The DOS-based games we tested should give you a fair idea of how, or even if, other games you have will run under Windows 95. And remember that a lot of what was said here, and in other articles on the same subject, is dependent on system configuration. Someone who is running a Pentium system with 32MB of RAM may not run into the same issues I did. You'll just have to try it on your system and find out for sure.

Bob Boulanger

REVIEW

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

As one of the first major games for Windows 95, *Activision's* **Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure** is certainly an impressive showcase of many of the superior capabilities of *Microsoft's* billion dollar baby.

Dodge crocodiles and jump over pits as the swingin'est guy in the jungle in this update of *Activision's* classic platform game. It's fairly typical of the genre – run around, jump things, swing over chasms, dodge or beat up creatures, find hidden areas, and then run around the 13 levels some more, searching for the exit. Best of all, if you quit the game you can restart on any completed level (with none of those asinine codes to enter).

The sound and animation are particularly strong suits of the game. The animation is via *Kroyer Films*, who worked on *Ferngully: The Last Rainforest*, while the sound effects are via *Soundelux Media Labs*, who have worked on films such as *True Lies* and *Cliffhanger*. The music is particularly good, with an appropriate jungle feel. You can choose either full music or just ambient jungle sounds (it uses CD Redbook audio, which is why both can't be active at the same time).

There are multiple modes of play in **Pitfall**, each of which provides different levels of performance. You can play it in any size window – the game scales all of the graphics to any size you like (which can provide some weird ratios – try it at around 25x600). Obviously the larger the view window, the faster the system you'll need. You can also play the game in a full screen mode that does away with the Windows menus and such. The game runs at 320x200 or 320x224 in these modes, and curiously enough, performance will possibly be *worse* than in a window, at least on those systems which have superb Windows accelerators with terrible DOS VGA performance (i.e. *Matrox* cards, the *Diamond* Viper, etc.).

The installation of the game is a particularly taxing experience. You actually have to insert the CD-ROM in the drive. Erm, and then it runs and you play the game. And that's it. It uses the new *Autoplay* feature of Windows 95, whereby you just stick the CD-ROM in and you don't even have to execute an install program. If you quit the game, your CD icon changes to a **Pitfall** icon as long as the CD-ROM is in the drive.

This is the first real test of Windows 95's joystick support, and it passes with flying colors. Support for the *Gravis* Gamepad is native in the operating system, and **Pitfall** supports all four of the buttons. Surprisingly, the keyboard is nearly the equal of a digital joystick.

It's arguable whether or not **Pitfall** shows real progress – I mean, are you excited now that your $2,500 Pentium is now the equal of a *Sega* Genesis? However, that doesn't discount the fact that **Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure** is a superb platform game with excellent sound and animation, but most importantly extremely entertaining gameplay. The possibilities of future platform conversions are endless; and we say, bring on the rest of 'em...

Steve Bauman

Designed and Published by: Activision
Platform: Windows 95

D-Day: America Invades!

For Whom the Death Knell Tolls?

Reluctance to initiate the D-Day invasion, both in real life as well as simulated terms, seems to stand out as a recurring, almost unnerving theme. Case in point, *Atomic Games*. No stranger to the battle strewn beaches of Normandy, key corporate officials burned the midnight oil for many a long, lonely night, considering the ramifications of once again storming the beaches. After all, they had already waded ashore against Nazi tyranny, not once but twice before. Both seaborne assaults came under the auspices of the now defunct **V for Victory** series, at one time proudly borne by the standardbearers of *Three Sixty Pacific*. Yes, **Utah Beach** and **Gold*Juno*Sword** have already demonstrated to the skeptics that *Atomic Games* are no longer green, untested troops but proven combat veterans well versed in the art of simulated combat.

For some time now though, *Atomic's* loyal clientele had been clamoring for an updated version of **Utah Beach**, not only taking advantage of the refinements developed during the evolution of the **World at War** engine but perhaps encompassing the entire U.S. effort in the cross channel invasion. Indeed, pressure had been building from within as well, to integrate the former **V for Victory** titles within the **World at War** system. Re-releasing the former games as **World at War** titles would not only harness the speed and AI improvements and interface enhancements accomplished over the past two years, but in so doing would finally incorporate the long sought after PBEM (Play By E-Mail) option many a wargamer had been promised. The decision to integrate at least the first installment then, was thrust upon them much as it was our Supreme Commander some fifty one years ago.

Beaucoup bocage?

That said, *Atomic Games/Avalon Hill's* latest **World at War** title, **D-Day, America Invades** stands as a colossal undertaking, not unlike the **World at War: Stalingrad** installment released earlier this year. **America Invades** not only portrays the Utah Beach landings and pursuant drive on the key port city of Cherbourg, but includes the Omaha Beach theater of operations and follow-on campaigns as well. Like **Utah Beach, America Invades** simulates combat at the regimental/battalion level. When you consider the fact that the battlefield is scaled at one kilometer per hex, Hitler's southernmost segment of 'Festung Europa' or Fortress Europe encompasses a huge playing field. Indeed, the entire Norman peninsula is gorgeously recreated in exceptionally high detail, stretching from Cherbourg in the northwest to Coutances in the southwest, and as far out as Caumont to the east.

The Battle for St. Mere Eglise

Of course the time frame of the game is somewhat nebulous, dependent upon the scenario chosen. For instance, the Bradley's Nightmare and SS Counterattack scenarios, two of the shorter conflicts, occur between the June 12-13th and June 13-15th timeframes respectively. Mid range scenarios such as St. Lo, Operation Cobra, Utah Beach and Omaha Beach, obviously incorporating a greater array of units and a wider battlefield, occur anywhere from June 7th to July 29th inclusive. At the other end of the spectrum, the America Invades campaign scenario, encompassing the entire battle for control over Normandy, runs from D-Day +1 or June 7th to July 2nd. Expect to devote a good deal of time to play the campaign game through to the end.

Players are placed in the role of the supreme commander over their respective forces, whether they be commanding the U.S. or

Festung Europa

The second wave landings and beyond

German forces. Not only are land forces present (armor or *panzer*, infantry, artillery, motorized units, headquarters, etc.), but Orders of Battle include both naval and air units too. Of course not every asset is available on every turn or in every scenario, so players should heed their reinforcement schedules before embarking upon the field of battle.

As is the case in both series, game turns in **America Invades** span a four hour timeframe. Both players plot their moves simultaneously, based upon intelligence estimates of their own as well as their enemy's dispositions. Once all of the off-shore bombardment, aircraft missions and artillery fire is plotted, land movement and supply is determined and battle plans are laid out, players execute each turn, mutely watching as the action unfolds. Pop up message windows indicate when units are locked in battle, detailing the combat odds and results of each engagement. Once the turn has ended, players can, at their leisure, inspect each of the engagements or continue on to the next turn.

Because the **World at War** system is such a detailed combat simulation, grognards as well as inductees to the system may wish to enlist the help of the computer controlled staff assistant. Subordinate to the player, the staff assistant can be utilized to plot artillery fire, control supply or even direct the battle plans on a turn by turn or entire scenario basis. A worthwhile aid, players may, nevertheless, find that in order to achieve optimal results, they may in fact have to control every facet of the game. Pity.

While the game will probably not employ any historical video footage, many of the interface buttons, upon being enabled, call up some impressive digitized .WAV files. Players will be treated to a variety of aesthetic chrome such as abbreviated national anthems, the roar of passing aircraft or the use of teletype equipment. Let's not forget that when engagements are fought, explosions are used to emulate the din of battle.

Again, common to the system at-large, victories or losses are determined on a sliding scale, ranging from decisive to marginal. Victory points are generally awarded for the control of objectives but are influenced by the outcome of combat losses and the use of naval gunfire. A host of variants can also be pressed into service although variants range in scope and strongly influence the level of play balance. For instance, on the German side variants available include a stronger Cherbourg garrison, a closer deployment of the 17th SS *Panzergrenadiers*, the deployment of the 319th Division and 5th *Fallschirmjaeger* Divisions, the employment of the 'Rommel' plan. Alternatively, Allied options include the arrival of early storms, no storms, augmenting the invasion with the 11th Airborne, no VP penalty for the use of naval gunfire and additional air support. Both sides may even opt to use a random variant which is determined by the computer.

D-DAY: AMERICA INVADES POSSIBLY REPRESENTS THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE COMPUTERIZED TREATMENT ON THE EARLY STAGES OF THE WESTERN FRONT IN WORLD WAR II

S. H. A. E. F.'s Order of Battle

No longer a tranquil Norman countryside

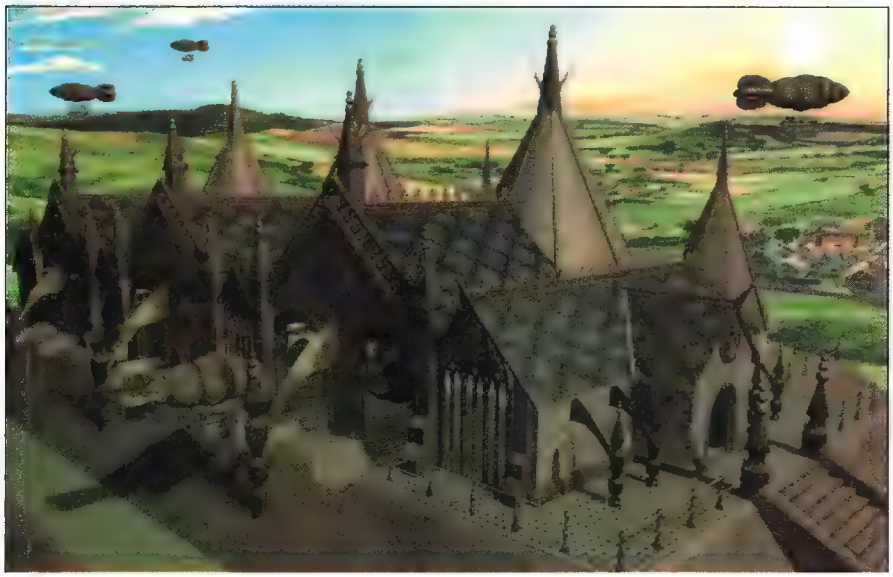
The infamous landings at Point du Hoc and Omaha Beach

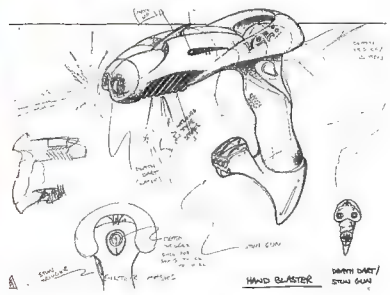
D-Day + 1 or -1

Much more than just a commemorative issue or dressed up re-release, in its present state, **D-Day: America Invades** possibly represents the most comprehensive computerized treatment on the early stages of the Western Front in World War II. Given the level of detail, wealth of historical information and realistic gameplay, **D-Day: America Invades** looks to storm onto many a hard drive come the Fall. By the way, if you think that Ike had nothing to worry about and the Axis fate was sealed from the outset, consider reading Peter Tsouras' eye-opening *Disaster at D-Day*. Tsouras provides an insightful account of what might have transpired had events unfolded a tad differently. Chilling.

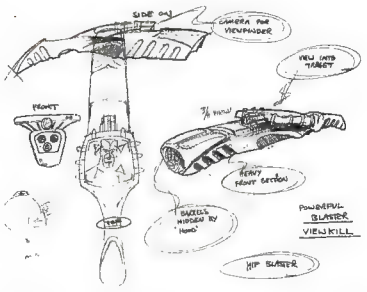
Marc Dultz

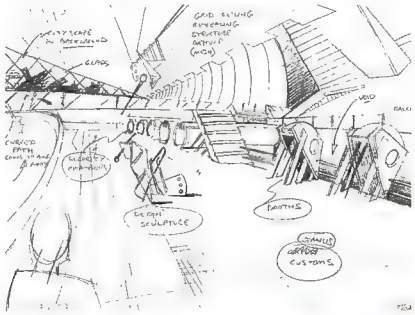
The Darkening





The planet Bex is like a giant Shaker community, colonized by humanists from the nearby planet Anhur. The people tend to shun technology. That is why they travel in those airships.





No, no, no! **The Darkening** isn't about vampires, nor is it an occult horror title. What it is, is an interactive space adventure and one of the most promising titles from *Origin Systems* presently in production. Executive producer, Erin Roberts has gone over to England and, starting almost from scratch, is now creating the first interactive movie ever made in Europe. According to Jennie Evans, *Origin*'s Director Of Marketing, "everybody apart from Erin is new to *Origin*."

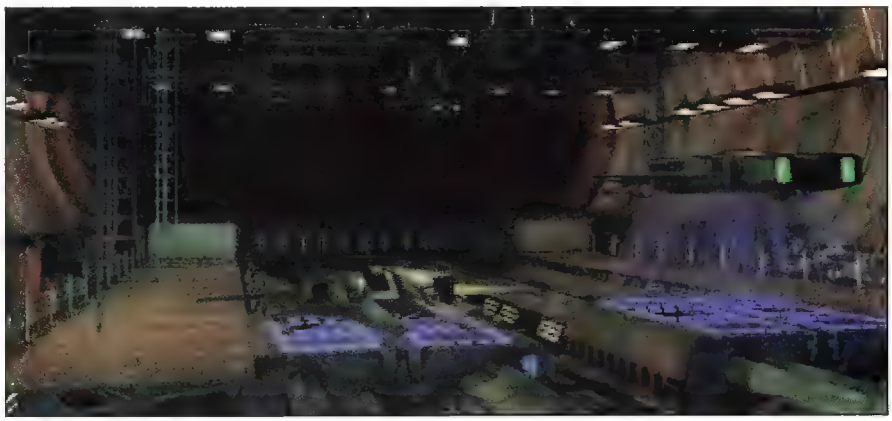
While this may almost guarantee that **The Darkening** will be a product with a fresh new look and feel, in addition to being cheaper than in the US for essentially movie production, Erin's reasoning for the move to Europe is "I wanted to get back to Europe and do something with the *Origin* brand.... I know how to make an *Origin* brand product."

With **Strike Commander**, **Privateer** and the **Wing Commander** series under his belt, at the very least, Erin knows how to do that. In fact he is so confident about it all that he is breaking away from the usual *Origin* production philosophy, if there is such a thing: "... basically we hired in two real designers... the idea here is you have people who write scripts and so forth. I don't believe you need these types of people. What I do believe you need are people who are from design backgrounds and architecture, and how to use things and make them user friendly and so forth."

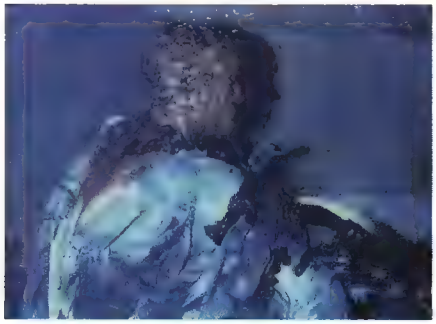
"One of the first things we wanted to do with this project is make it a game which anyone could get into and its elements concerning features and that sort. You know, you see something and work out how to use it just by looking at it. And that's one of the major things we wanted to get across in this game... if you get people from a design background, people who design stuff for big companies that you know help sell product to people and so forth, pull them in and say, this is what it has to be, make it work and have these guys just sit down and just make it work so it's really intuitive. It's like a huge bonus."

One of these designers and Creative Producers for **The Darkening** Adam Medhurst, says "what we try to do now is make a jump in evolution. Instead of product evolution being a gentle curve in terms of quality, we're actually making a big jump and trying to take the actual product to a level where we'll gain respect and reputation that the film industry already enjoys as an art form or entertainment form. So what we try to gain is a new recognized identity that there is more than just playing a game."

There is definitely more to **The Darkening** than "just playing a game." With 50 big screen and TV actors (Christopher Walken, John Hurt, David Warner, David McCallem and Brian Blessed to name a few), 500 extras, real sets, special effects, a five million dollar budget—we're talking a full blown movie here, but don't panic! Just because other interactive games have made big noises about their full motion

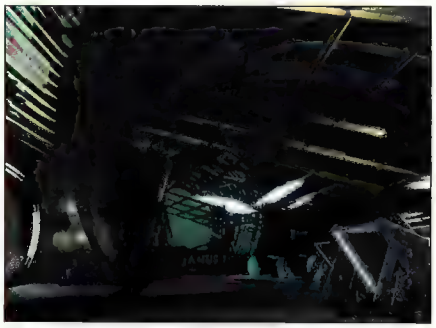


The landing dock for the un-hospitable planet Hades. Its harsh environment is due to extensive testing of military hardware.



That's what you get for sticking your head into the bread machine!

Your virtual alter ego for The Darkening is played by British star Clive Owens.



Customs area for Janus IV (fourth moon of the gaseous giant Janus), the commercial center for the system.

video productions and then fell woefully short on game play, with Erin at the helm, **The Darkening** will most likely avoid this pitfall. He puts it this way: "... you use all of the central elements there are for a game on this type of product... one of the first things about making interactive movies is 'okay we're using real actors,' but in the end it is a game, and you have to keep that in mind. It's just no good throwing some video in, which I think is a mistake that a lot of companies do. And the idea [with **The Darkening**] is the actual movie stuff is in there to get the player more involved with the storyline. You still have all the interactive elements in the game to make it a game. No one is going to walk out and spend sixty dollars in the states and buy something they can see on film – the big screen."

That's what gamers want to hear. There IS a game in there. so what is the game about, as Erin describes it? "It opens with a ship going down and all the wonderful special effects. This is an actual adventure. There's a lot of fast moving stuff, a lot of stuff going on there. **Wing Commander III** was very 'still shot - still shot', so forth and that was to do with compression. We now have new compression called TGV [completely software based], written in our Canadian office which now allows us to use basically any camera movement used in films... So we can pan, zoom, cut, we can do anything on that level. We can use smoke, we can use lightning. [Anyway,] Ship goes down and crashes. The only one who survives is in the cryo-pod. This happens to be you and you wake up and basically, because the cryo-pod had to be opened quickly to save your life, it basically caused you to have a memory loss... when you start, you're sitting there, you have a bank account that has some money in it, you have a new identity which was only created for you about - as [far as] you can make out, a couple of weeks ago. This is all in the introduction, so I'm not giving anything away here, but no one understands why and what's going on. From then on, you're free to do what you want to do."

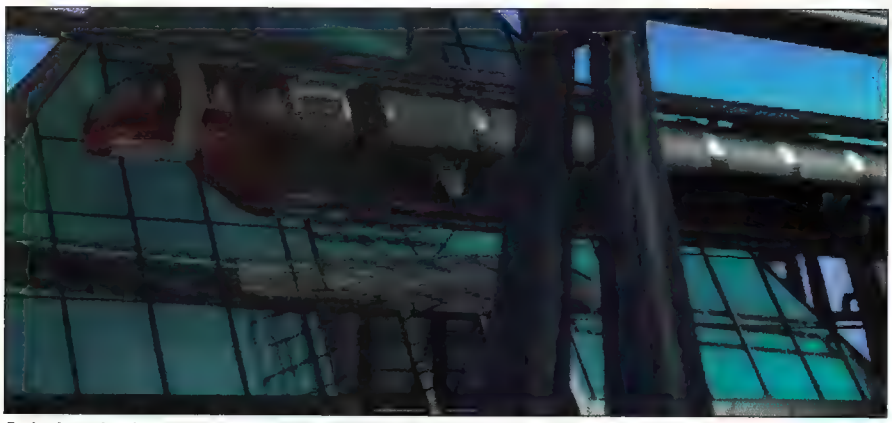
"You can: A) find out who you are by sort of tracking across clues, looking in the right areas, go to the right data base and so forth, or B) if you want you can just go off and trade and build money up and build better ships, or C) you can do both. You can travel around and just meet people. When we did the video here, we didn't want it to be linear. We didn't want it to be, you go from here meet this person 'bang' that's what the video was about. The video is about populating the universe. There are people who are just there that you walk into on one location of the planet and someone you meet has nothing to do with your past. He's just a person who is there... rather than in the old days... you had like computer generated people. The only difference is we're replacing all those guys with real people. So the idea is you can go and meet people and do things that have nothing to do with your past... The other thing is you really want to find out what is going on."

"You can search out the police and track down what is going on. That's a level, but it's not done in a way that you feel like you're being led. There are only one or two people who know what happened and it's up to you to track those people down and find out the story and obviously, we know the story before hand, there is no way to get around that, but we've gone out of our way to make it feel like a populated universe."

Okay, sounds good. The big question for Erin is: will my machine run **The Darkening**? "Our in- house game engine tool, called EOR... was first created back for **Strike Commander** and those days, but since then only **Wing 3**... [When] You have a piece of code and keep updating it, it gets bigger. We've now taken the engine and stripped it out. It's now about five times smaller than it used to be. It's moved over to *Watcom C* and it used to be in high *C* under *Netware*, and there is a lot of different changes we've done to it. It's much faster, it's much smaller, more compact on that sort of level. We just looked at it and decided what we need to do is update it and modernize it. Now the only similarity between what we're using and what we had under the *Origin* stuff is basically the same primitives. Which we'll have for the same 3D engine stuff. The rest of it is completely changed which was a move we really wanted to make. Although now when we release into the market—we'll be looking at most people having high end 486's if not Pentiums by then because we're looking at February (96') release. We just decided that obviously speed is very necessary. This will be a SVGA product only... the other thing we did was updated, when the code was first written, it was written in support you know, basically all machines. Whether it used local bus or not. Everything is at least local bus and so now we've written the code so it's a lot faster because it... [is] especially written for local bus machines.... Minimum requirements are the same as **Wing 3**, 486/50, 8 megs RAM, 4 CD's, double speed CD-ROM."

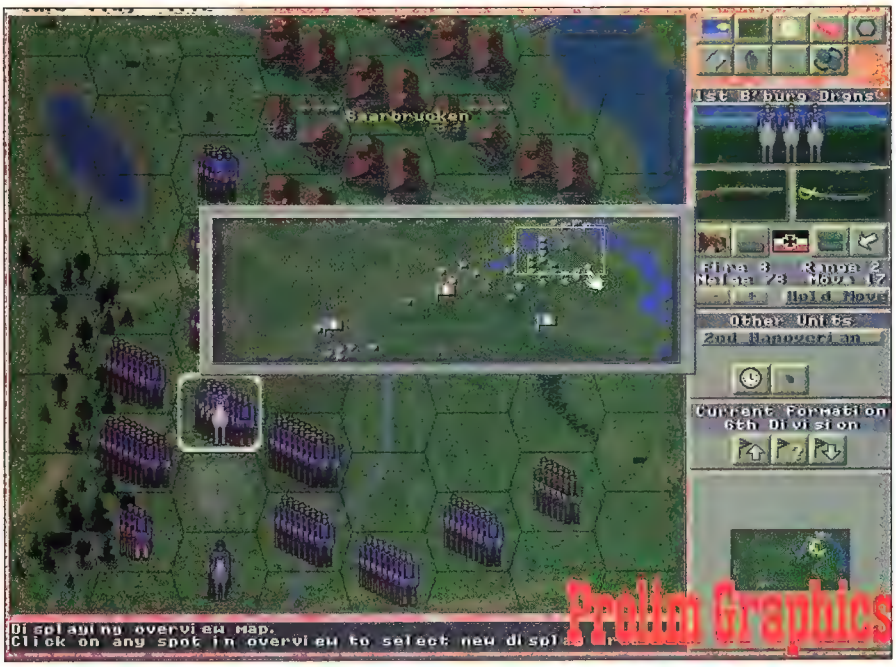
The Darkening's non-linear format of game play will undoubtedly be compared to **Privateer**. From what I have seen, **The Darkening** has the potential to take non-linear format interactive games to the next level in a highly polished package.

Ben Chiu



Each planet has its own transportation system.

Wargame Construction Set III: The Age of Rifles



*Lord willin' and the creek don't rise, you should see **Wargame Construction Set III: The Age of Rifles** on store shelves soon after you read this. The title is a bit of a mouthful, so we'll just call it **Rifles** in this article.*

Why Rifles?

Tactical wargames with significant simulation mechanics began to appear in the mid 19th century. It seems to me ironic that this period should be pretty much ignored in computer wargaming. The American Civil War has been covered from time to time, with spotty results. 19th century European and colonial battlefields have been almost entirely overlooked. Most gamers reared on miniatures rules and board wargames haven't had much to sink their teeth into, until now.

Covering the period from the earliest introduction of the rifle as a standard issue weapon in the 1840's to the deployment of rapid fire artillery and the machine gun at the turn of the 20th century, **Rifles** should do for the 19th century battlefield what **TANKS!** did for the 20th century. My intent, as in **TANKS!**, was to cover a clearly defined period of military history; in this case the rise, golden age, and fall of the rifle armed private infantryman. The SVGA graphics in **Rifles** are vastly improved over those in **TANKS!** and the game mechanics have been rewritten from the ground up, but the basic design philosophy remains. Beneath a player interface designed to make the game as approachable as possible is a serious tactical simulation. And while the popular topic of the American Civil War will receive extensive coverage, less well known conflicts get equal treatment.

The other scenario designers and I have indulged our personal interests in the obscure, so the (approximately) 40 scenarios to be included with the game feature battles from the Mexican American, Crimean, and Franco Prussian Wars, as well as British colonial conflicts in Africa and India. There will also be several linked scenario campaigns, in addition to the random campaigns featured in **TANKS!**.

Once you tire of the standard scenarios, you can use the random scenario generator to create a wide variety of battles. With a few mouse clicks, you can pit a confederate infantry division against a Zulu impi. If your tastes run more to the historical, you can set up Russians vs. Turks (1870's), Prussians vs. Austrians (1860's), or, well, you get the idea. And finally, if you want to design a scenario by hand there is a very flexible scenario editor. Over a hundred different classes of weapons are available, ranging from spears and bows to gunboats and machine guns, as well as seventeen standard nationalities.

Miniatures fans might want to dig out their painting guides, because one of the things that define a unit is its uniform. There are currently more than 13 million possible uniform combinations allowed in the editor.

Several games in one

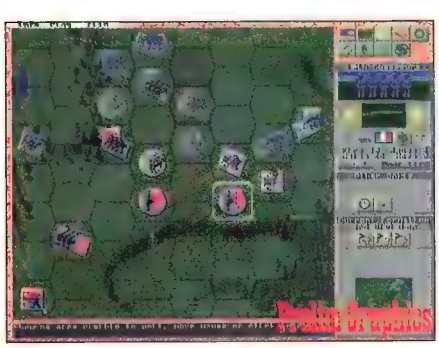
You can play **Rifles** as a detailed, miniatures-oriented simulation, or as a simple beer and pretzels game. There are two sets of rules, and two different interfaces. At its simplest, **Rifles** plays at about the level of *SSI*'s **Panzer General**. At its most complex, it can challenge the most experienced of gamers. There are also two possible game scales, allowing for a wide range in the size of battles. At the 200 yard, 20 minute, company / regiment scale, battles with roughly 5000 to 60000 troops can be fought. At 400 yards per hex, 40 minute turns, and brigade scale, you can model battles as large as Gettysburg (1863) or Liaoyang (1904). Scenarios can start at any time of day or night, and continue for up to several days, in any weather, on maps representing temperate, arid, or frozen terrain.

Gruesome details

Beyond the tracking of mount status and individual levels of ammo as in **TANKS!**, your batteries, companies, squadrons, battalions, regiments and brigades are each individually rated for morale, training, vitality (fatigue level), tactical formation, skirmisher status, and several different temporary morale, rest, and communication states. All of these things affect your units' performance. For example, the tactical formations available to a unit depend upon its level of training. Fuzzy Wuzzies can't form line.

Random stuff

More? Troops armed with muzzle loading and lever action rifles are at a disadvantage when taking cover from enemy fire – unless they are



pinball illusions

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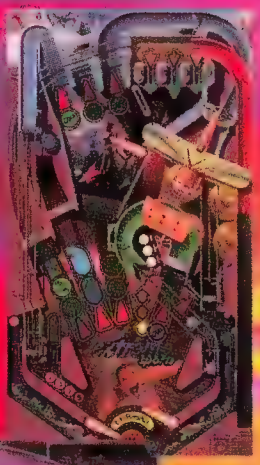

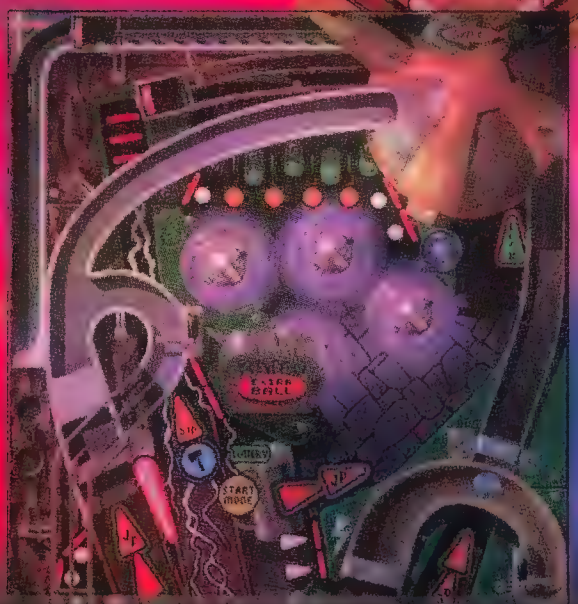

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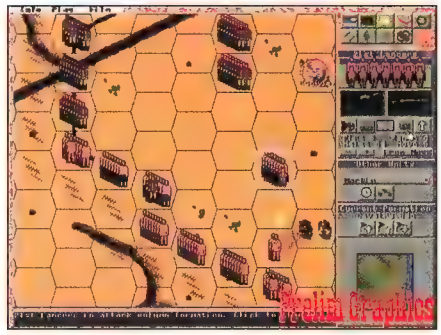

behind a wall. At night, or in bad weather, you can lose control of your units easily. They can even fire accidentally on nearby friendly units. While warships must remain in deep water, gunboats can enter shallows at the risk of running aground. A unit's movement allowance is tied to its vitality level, and its basic costs for movement depend upon the unit's tactical formation and whether the unit has been fired on recently. A tired regiment, under fire, in line formation, isn't going to move very fast. A fresh regiment, in march column, far from the sound of the guns, can practically fly. If you overrun enemy artillery, you may be able to capture the guns. In most cases, you can't operate captured guns, but you can try to haul them off. This has given rise to a number of interesting local battles during playtest.

Microtactics

The full advanced rules are definitely not for the faint of heart, but as a detail fanatic I personally find the advanced game to be more enjoyable than its predecessor. The number of what I think of as "microtactical" decisions; the things a unit does within one hex, is vastly greater than it was in **TANKS!**. There is definitely a strong "paper, rock, scissors" element in deciding whether to form line to maximize fire strength, or form attack columns and deploy skirmishers in preparation for an advance on an enemy redoubt. Do the wrong thing, and the bad guys are certain to take advantage of it. Of course this works both ways. It can be fun to launch 300 Russian hussars into the exposed flank of 700 British highlanders in line formation.

Post release development

Dave Landrey's *Novastar* gnomes are hard at work on **Rifles** scenarios, and I know Dave has plans to release a number of scenario disk add ons for **Rifles** after the game is released. His scenario disks for **TANKS!** have been well received, and I expect to see a similar blizzard of **Rifles** scenarios from *Novastar*.

After the release of **TANKS!**, I was inundated with suggestions for improvements to the game. Many of these suggestions were quite good, and eventually the list built to the point that I decided to incorporate the best of the lot in an unofficial update. Then the floodgates really opened, and eight more such updates followed. With each, the game improved significantly.

Folks who hang out on *Compuserve* and *GEnie* know my little secret. I am really a hobbyist at heart. The realities of the market being what they are, these updates had zero impact on sales. I had fun though, and players of the unofficial versions of **TANKS!** will recognize some of the features that are standard in **Rifles**: variable weather, reinforcements, and scenario lengths, "frantic fire," etc.

Some of the things players asked for after **TANKS!** was released couldn't be implemented in my unofficial updates to that game, but they did make the wish list for **Rifles**. You have more control over unit automatic reaction orders in **Rifles** than in **TANKS!**, and **Rifles** scenarios allow mixed nationalities as well as player defined nationalities. Things like leaders, supply sources, computer controlled movement of routed units, and fires have been added to the rules. I look forward to hearing suggestions for improvements to **Rifles** after release. And now that I know what to expect, I am also looking forward to this iterative tinkering process with **Rifles**. With the pressure of deadlines out of the way, I plan to create a number of "off the wall" scenarios ("freeware") for BBS release. Maps and orders of battle for several battles drawn from the British conquest of the Sind, Gwalior and Sikh wars are all waiting to be turned into scenarios. Then there are the operations of the western relief force in the boxer rebellion... I don't quite know where to start, but I expect to enjoy this next year.

Norm Koger

Norm Koger began his career as an independent computer wargame developer in 1987 while completing his MS in solid state physics. He lives near Austin, Texas, with his wife, two cats, and two young sons who enjoy banging on his office door.

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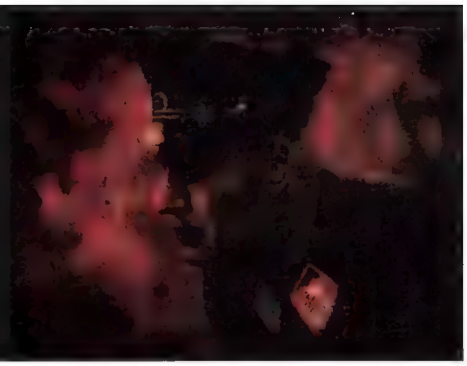
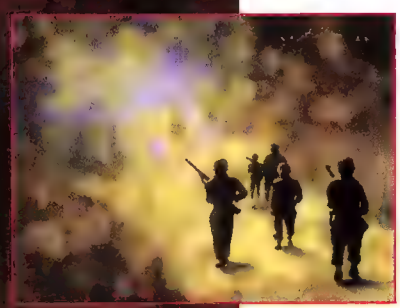
Allied General



Panzer General has been something of a phenomenon. The first war game (you've noticed that *SSI* was careful not to use that term in its advertising?) to really cross genre lines, **Panzer General** has pulled new blood into wargaming from the ranks of strategy gamers and elsewhere. The ease of play, the construction of a core of units tailored to your personal preferences, and the increase in abilities gained by these units via experience, all seem to be a big part of **Panzer General**'s appeal. Overall good looks and multimedia glitz probably help with the initial enticement, but it's the playability that keeps us coming back.



Over six months after its release (at the time of this writing) the nets are still filled with enthusiastic players swapping strategies, starting up email games, and most importantly, asking the question, "What should I play next?" This last has been a tough one, as **Panzer General** is in a league of its own. There aren't many other wargames out there that can provide an increasing challenge for beginners while still being fun and accessible. *SSI* has heard your pleas! **Allied General** is headed our way.

SSI has tapped *Halestorm, Inc.* to do the follow-up, but **Panzer General** Associate Producer Rick Martinez is still providing a guiding hand, so we can anticipate that the strengths of the original will continue into the new game. The first, most obvious difference is that **Allied General** will run under Windows (optimized for Win '95 but the plan is for it to run under Win 3.11 as well). The game will ship on CD only. If you haven't found a good reason to upgrade yet, this might be it! Mac users will also be happy to learn that the Mac and Windows versions will be released at approximately the same time.

As in **Panzer General**, **Allied General** will have full multimedia treatment. Voice actors are being sought to ensure that the accents are authentic (you play a Brit, an American, or a Russian), and each campaign will have artwork which fits in with the nationality modeled. The Russian campaign will have an early industrial, rather bleak look, for instance, while the American will be all flag-waving and Uncle Sam.

As suggested by the name, you'll get the chance to play as the various allies. There are three (almost four) different campaigns. As the British, you'll have the option of starting in the deserts of North Africa. Assuming you do well there, you'll be put in charge of the Western Front campaign. Russian soldiers are concerned with the Eastern Front, of course. Americans start at the Western Front, but it will be slightly different from the British Western Front campaign (hence it is almost a fourth campaign). When you play the same battle from the British and American campaigns, the auxiliary units will come from the other army. In other words, the auxiliary units in a British battle will be the core units in an American battle, and vice versa. Victory conditions should be different as well. It should be interesting to see these battles from both sides.

Obviously, some of the more famous historical battles of **Panzer General** will be repeated in **Allied General**. But again, the point of view has changed. So, for instance the Bulge scenario in **Allied General** will begin with the German army at the point of their deepest penetration. This point is Day 1 in **Allied General**, with your task being to throw the Wehrmacht back.

The designers are striving for a bit more of a role playing feel to **Allied General**. When you start, you'll create a character. The game will maintain a listing of personal win/loss records for this character, as well as keep track of any campaign ribbons or medals he has earned for exceptional performance. The character may or may not be "international." If not, you'll create a character for each nationality.

There will be fewer core units in the new game. Overall unit density will thus be lower, allowing a

more open feel to the battlefield, with lots of fluid troop movements. On average, there'll be about 35% fewer units in an **Allied General** scenario than in a **Panzer General** scenario. A secondary benefit of this is to get the player more focused on the core units, which makes losses count even more than they did in **Panzer General**. In the early scenarios, however, players will be given a greater proportion of auxiliary troops to use as "fodder" while learning the game system.

In order to advance in the campaigns, major victories (keyed once again to dates) will still be important. If you fail, though, it won't be the end of the war. The Allied Command will just find a more experienced commander for its troops. You'll be shipped home, a broken man. Again, the intent here is to make the game hit you more personally, since the assumption is that, perhaps *you* couldn't achieve victory, but someone else could.

Another possible major change (though this is still in the "pending" file) is to the air modules. First, some history. The theory in **Panzer General** is that fighters are actually flying brief sorties. This explains why they can remain airborne for multiple turns; when you send them home to refuel, it actually represents them being taken off the flight line for maintenance. This theory doesn't really hold up as well for the longer ranges and flight times of some bombers. So, in **Allied General**, the proposed system will have you selecting a bomber at an airfield, and giving it orders to bomb a specified location. It will fly there, bomb the target, then fly directly home. This will much more closely reflect historical bomber flights, and is more in line with the way such sorties have been treated in many of Gary Grigsby's designs for *SSI*. Another proposed change is to be able to issue orders to a fighter unit to escort the bombers. Thereafter, the unit will be attached to those bombers and remain with them for the duration of their mission. All such proposed changes are an attempt to make the game more realistic without losing any playability.

With three separate campaigns, **Allied General** should provide great play value, and we're promised as many, if not more, scenarios than were present in the earlier game. But just in case those ever get "played out," **AG** includes a scenario editor. You'll be able to start with any of the 38-40 maps used in the packaged scenarios, or one of many extra maps included just for user-created scenarios. The editor is very flexible, giving you access to the entire database of units and equipment. In this way, you can model ahistorical "what if" scenarios, matching weapon platforms which never actually met on the field of battle.

The database will be expanded somewhat, with a few new units. Martinez points out that the **Panzer General** database is already pretty well complete, so most new units will be varieties of infantry. There has also been some consideration of adding equipment which was in development when the war ended, but that never saw battle. Dare we say it? The "Secret Weapons of **Allied General**."

Multiplayer fans will be pleased to learn that the E-mail system is being overhauled. One of the more common complaints of the current system is that it can be hard to tell exactly what happened during your opponent's last turn. In the new system, when an opponent sends you an E-mail move, you'll be able to examine a history of the game so far, and watch a replay of your opponent's last move. Obviously you won't see units that your troops haven't spotted, but watching the piece by piece movement will make clear where units are coming from and going to. It may also teach you something about your opponent, and bring the face to face feel closer to reality.

*... **Allied General** will offer you more of the same great gameplay that you loved in **Panzer General**, and give you a slicker, more refined gaming experience.*

As you can see, **Allied General** will offer you more of the same great gameplay that you loved in **Panzer General**, and give you a slicker, more refined gaming experience. Newcomers to the series should be delighted. For fans of the first game, **Allied General** should be a shoe-in. It ought to take many hours to win as the British, the Americans, and then the Russians. After that, the scenario editor should keep us happy until the next "General" comes along. Might we take to the warm waters of the Pacific? *SSI* isn't saying, but they have indicated that they aren't anywhere *near* ready to retire this excellent engine yet. ◆

Peter Smith

Druid: Dæmons of the Mind

Druid: Dæmons of the Mind, the new fantasy role-playing game from Sir-tech Software is set to be released in October. In this article, Brenda Garno, a member of Druid's design team, takes us into the world of game design and provides an insight into Sir-tech's upcoming game.

It's July 1, 1995, 3:21 am, and I've just finished the last line of text for **Druid**. I want to celebrate, but I have no brain. Instead, I sort of fall into bed and sleep. Five hours later, I am at work again. I consider myself lucky; I know designers who don't get to sleep for days (in fact, I think Doug Church of *Looking Glass* last slept in 1986). Nonetheless, **Druid** is done, and with my remaining brain cells, I am pleased. All those ideas that we had six months ago are now real.

What we wanted to do

When **Druid's** design began, we had three basic principles: keep it true to role-playing, make it logical, but make it a game that everyone can play and enjoy. There's a market out there for hard-core role-playing games (we know; we publish them). However, sometimes these games are so complex that gamers without role-playing experience just feel overwhelmed and miss out on all the best role-playing has to offer – character interaction and attachment, depth of story and length of play. With **Druid**, we hoped to create a game that had every facet of role-playing but welcomed newcomers, too... a merging of role-playing and adventure. Here's how.

Keep it simple

Unlike many role-playing systems, **Druid** does not have 40 statistics, 200 skills and 3.5 million sub-skills. It has just the basics – all any good DM needs to determine a character's performance for any given event. A lot of skills and statistics in today's games (and, keep in mind, we have the source code to prove this), are actually calculated from these base statistics. So, in **Druid**, that's all you'll find on screen, just the essentials. Nothing more, nothing less. Behind the scenes, though, all the calculations are there, and RPG veterans can check the appendix in the manual that explains how every last move was calculated.

Give 'em the eye candy

In **Druid**, every single object is fully rendered in SVGA. Our artists even took it a step further. They "roughed" things up so it didn't look like another *3D Studio* wireframe product. They added shadows. They took extra time to texture walls so they looked like stone and to "buff" floors so they were polished like marble. They even added snow and ice (not common in games and quite difficult to do). Although everything is modeled, it looks, we hope, artistically real. Even the characters in the game are true renditions of their human counterparts, right down to the stomach blocks and leg muscles. And, since it's fully 3D, we can zoom in and around anything at anytime for eye candy cut scenes.

With this graphic appeal, we hope adventure players will feel at home. Role players, on the other hand, will welcome something beyond the traditional pixelated worlds we have known.

Bag the monster menu

Borrowing from adventure games, we hoped to make **Druid's** interface as simple as possible. What you see is what you get. If you want to check something out, walk over there (left click) and investigate it. You want to cast a spell? Right click, and your amulet, the source of your magical power, comes into light. Reviewing your character? Click on him. It's that easy.

Audience: Brenda, adventure gamers will love it. What about role players?

Response: This interface, the collective effort of about 15 gamers, contains every single thing a role-playing game ever had. You just don't have to click through a ton of menus to get it. Besides, it's easy, but it's not giving. You won't find things that you don't have the means to find, and you won't click on an icon only to have the whole story unfold before you. Unlike adventure games, the interface is designed around what you know, not what you don't know but hope to find out.

Forget the versus

Phased versus real-time combat, the true divider of the role-playing genre. In **Druid**, you'll find both forms. **Druid** is neither and it is both, just as real (i.e. pencil and paper) role playing is. Really.

Audience: Brenda, are you making sense?
Response: Yes, bear with me. I am.

All real role playing combat follows the phased real-time philosophy: we will give you time to make the decisions you need, but if you stand there like an idiot, the DM will eventually decide the monster should hit you. It's no different with **Druid**.

But, the play's the thing...

At *Sir-tech*, we've always believed the story was more important than the glitz of the game – great graphics and sound and an empty story does not a good game make. And, the story of **Druid** is one of our pride and joys. In fact, during the development of **Druid's** story, I actually "played" it through from beginning to end on paper just to make sure everything worked and unfolded the way we had intended it to.

Split across five islands, we tried to create a story design not found in other role playing or adventure games. How? By making it logical. Aside from that, it's actually based upon traditional druidic beliefs. Over a year in the making (yes, just the story), with a small library's worth of research (16 books, if you're counting), **Druid's** storyline is novella length. There's a reason for that. The movie is never better than the book. In **Druid**, we've tried to provide a unique mix of the two.

It began with a single theme – Druids and their Celtic origins living upon a world with five islands. Give these Druids power. Give them a problem – their missing brother, Lawson. Then, let the story take the designer with it. That's just what happened with **Druid**. Add to that the overall design principle: "Do not make this hokey. Everything must happen for a reason. Every item must be there for a reason. You must be there for a reason, and that reason must not be to kill the big bad wizard." And, so, the story began.

Four Druids, Astor, Curak, Havnar and Lawson upon the world of Navan. Each has his own island, a world within a world, and worships a particular earth power – the four elements as we know them, and as the actual druids respected them. They have learned how to master these particular powers and have also learned to master their mental control of these powers. Perfect control of and respect for mind, body and earth, just as their ancestors believed. As their mental powers developed, the Druids gained two abilities:

- If they had seen a place before, they could instantly travel there by thinking it again (something Julius Caesar's troops believed the druids could do)
- If they collectively thought a single thought, they could will it into or out of existence. For instance, if they wanted to create a giant keg of beer, they needed only imagine it as a group... and there it was. A very cool power, indeed. Some people tried this with the Pentagon almost thirty years ago.

Because of these powers, the Druids could not visit each other's islands for fear they could again appear anytime they like (if they have seen it, they can be there). As independent rulers of their own "worlds," such a thought was not comforting. It's akin

to letting a foreign ruler into the USA anytime he liked without anyone knowing. For this reason, the Druids created the Common Ground, a place where they could meet to discuss world matters and to further their own interests, a Druids' UN of sorts.

Chief among the Druids' goals is the exploration of space. If only they can see a world, the stars, they could be there and expand their empire. These experiments led the Druids and their people on many paths, some not even remotely moral.

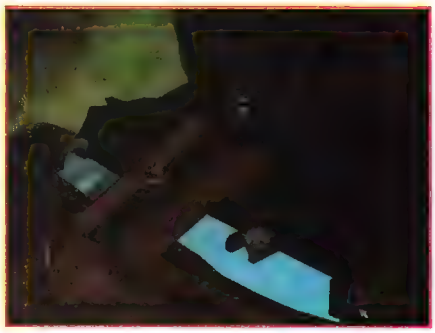
And then, Lawson disappears.

They suspect he has been kidnapped, destroyed ... they don't precisely know. They communicate with each other using the mind, just like you and I communicate with words. And they have heard nothing in a very long time. Not only does this concern them, it puts their plans on hold.

You, grand-son/grand-daughter of a full druid, are perfect for the Druids' needs. Night after night, they try to reach you and your latent power, filling your dreams with images of a room upon the Common Ground. Once your image meets with theirs (collectively they can will anything into or out of existence), you are there. Not a full Druid, you pose no real threat to them traveling through all their worlds to find clues of Lawson's disappearance, something they cannot do for political reasons. But they need Lawson back ... or at least to know what's become of him. And so, you arrive, not knowing quite where you have come or how you got here. You'll travel throughout their world looking for clues to Lawson's disappearance.

Along the way, you'll meet dozens of NPCs who live upon the islands and have knowledge to offer of Lawson or their world. Of course, being separated for a millennium, lots of them aren't even aware other islands exist and so go about their own lives.

You go about your own game. What happens during its course is rather hard to predict. The story sort of wrote itself; you're welcome to take whatever path you like.



Stonehenge...

Note the detailed shadows on all characters

The elegantly simple spell menu. Combining the elements creates powerful spells

Random note regarding the research

Druid is wildly Celtic in nature, contains many of the true beliefs of the druids and makes use of numerous myths which Caesar's troops believed to be true of the druids. The main male character, in fact, is modeled from the Lindow Man, what is believed to be the body of a druid, pulled from a peat bog in 1984.

Through all the books and articles, I couldn't help but develop an understanding of their ways, and wonder, what if just a few of them actually had the power Caesar said they did? What if they were able to make it off this Earth before their civilization was swallowed by the Romans? How far would it have developed? What would they be like? These thoughts and answers carried into **Druid** ... and will hopefully carry into the future of the series. ◆

Brenda Garno

Battlecruiser: 3000AD

A visit to the designer's lair yields solid evidence that it really exists! The legends of cyberspace speak of a mythical creature. Through the ages (well, the last five years) many have glimpsed screen shots, heard rumours, and spoken in hushed tones about release dates and publishers. Recently, these legends have grown more believable; finally, one hot summer day, the investigative reporters at *Strategy Plus* received a message: **Battlecruiser: 3000AD** had been picked up by *Take 2 Interactive*. We snorted! We scoffed! We needed to see *proof*! And so it was that we found ourselves in Miami, chatting with Derek Smart, the creator of **Battlecruiser: 3000AD**.

For those who've never heard of it, **Battlecruiser: 3000AD** is a monster of a space strategy/simulation game. The player takes charge of the battlecruiser of the title, and has the choice of dealing with all the minutiae of running the vessel. The scripted goal of the game is to find a powerful weapon before the bad guys do, but the beauty of **Battlecruiser** lies in the freedom it gives you. If you don't want to follow the plot you can just explore the galaxy, try to get rich via trading, or even become a space pirate.

Battlecruiser uses what Derek calls "AI goal processing," which means every element in the game has been assigned certain goals it will try to obtain without input from the player. If you ignore the fact that two planets go to war, for instance, and opt instead to make a quick buck running some contraband, the war will still go on and will influence other sectors of space. The galaxy does not revolve around you and your actions!

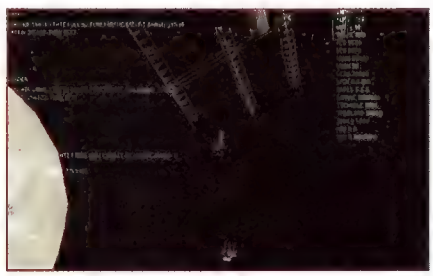
Of course, you can't run a ship as big as the 'cruiser without some help. That's where the crew comes in. Each crew member has a set of statistics, and these improve with experience. You can store DNA samples from an officer, and if that officer is killed, a replacement can be cloned (anyone remember **Planet's Edge**?). Worker bees can simply be replaced by hiring more of them at the next space dock. In addition to the crew, the 'cruiser has a brig with facilities for up to 40 prisoners, and guest accommodations for visiting dignitaries. You'd be advised to keep the brig in good repair, because if you don't, and the prisoners make a jail break, all hell is going to break loose.

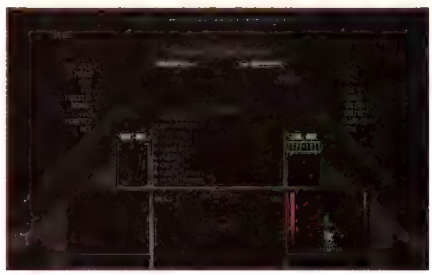
In addition to people, the battlecruiser contains various vehicles. Included are shuttles, interceptors, probes, ATVs and marines. Yes, the marines are people, but since they zip along in jet packs they are treated almost like vehicles. In order to launch an interceptor, first it must be prepped by the flight engineers, then armed, and then two pilots must be assigned to it. Once they've gotten to the flight deck and climbed aboard, the interceptor can be launched. At this point, you either issue orders to it and let it fly off, or jump into the body of the pilot and fly it yourself. The same holds true for each of the other vehicles.

Of course, with all these people, and all these vehicles, the ship is going to need supplies. Nothing comes for free in **Battlecruiser**. Damage can be repaired at a dock for cash, or your engineers can work on it, provided they have the needed parts. Missiles need to be replaced... heck, interceptors and even shuttles may need to be replaced if a battle goes sour! In the event that you're unable to limp in to a repair dock, you can request a tow, provided your immediate surroundings are free from hostiles and you can afford the considerable fee. Assuming you stay on the good side of the law you'll get a paycheck every fifteen days, but to help stretch it you can do interplanetary trading for fun and profit.

The actual flight sequences aren't overly detailed. The thrust of the game is more on the strategic aspects of running the whole operation, with the various sim modules being a bit of gravy to keep the adrenaline pumping. This isn't to say that they're easy; enemy forces can pack a real wallop. But the flight controls are fairly basic. Not so the overall game, though. One of Derek's concerns is that he is running out of keyboard command mappings and he still has more commands to implement. At the time of this writing, the keyboard command chart ran five pages or so!

We offer you a clean, brief glimpse at **Battlecruiser: 3000AD** in its alpha stage. Beyond the initial release, a "Boarding Module" will be worked on (can you say **Rules of Engagement** and **Breach**?). This will allow you to roam around the battlecruiser and other ships in a first person, **DOOM**-like way. Beyond that and further down the time stream, Derek hopes to create an on-line multi-player version of the game. Imagine being the commander of the 'Cruiser, with all the pilots being played by friends!





Battlecruiser: 3000AD is *not* a product for the casual gamer. There isn't an awful lot of multimedia glitz, either. Derek set out to create a serious, in-depth strategic space game. He wanted to give the player an experience somewhere between *Star Trek*™ and *Babylon 5*™. **Battlecruiser** has the free range of *Trek*, with the grittiness and realism of *B5*. If it all comes together as planned, hard core gamers are going to swoon when they see this one.

Peter Smith

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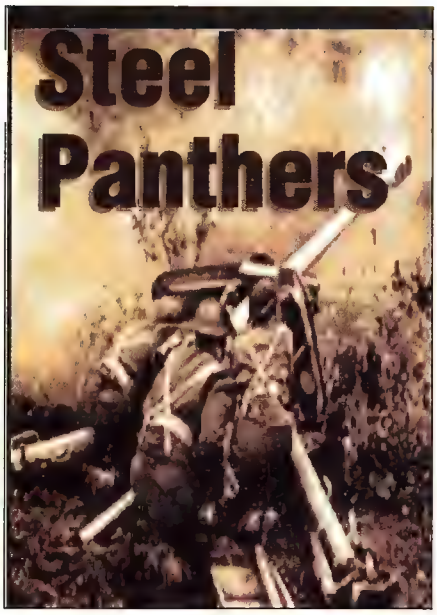
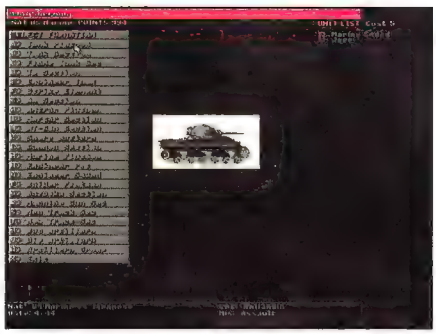
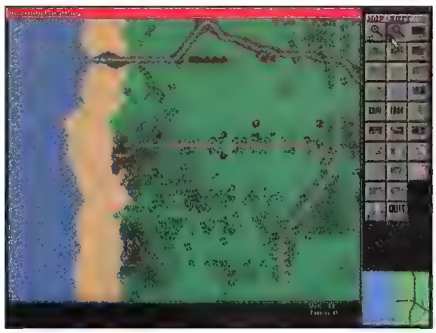


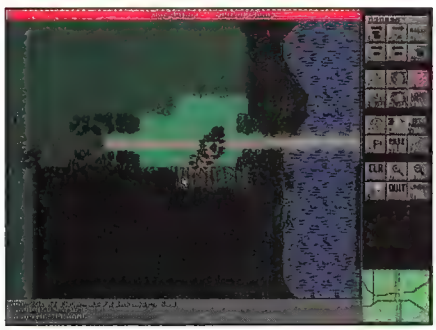
The Time Tunnel



Ye olde equipment lot



Terraforming a beach



Ambush!

Steel Panthers is a fast moving, enjoyable game of platoon armored combat in World War II by Gary Grigsby and *SSI*. It enters a relatively crowded market place also inhabited by **Wargame Construction Set II:Tanks!** and **Tigers on the Prowl),** but it offers a fresh look at the period and small unit combat. The look and feel of the game is one of miniatures instead of counter based board games. Computer miniatures games are often failures, but **Steel Panthers** succeeds with this approach.

The game period covers the entire war from 1939 to 1945 in both the Atlantic and the Pacific. The game is platoon level, and displays individual tanks and squads on the battlefield. E-mail is supported for play between distant participants.

This preview is based on an advanced beta. As such, it did not have all the features enabled or documentation provided. Only the German sides seem to be playable at this point and not all of the single scenarios load. The campaign game is fully functional. However, during over ten hours of play there was only one crash, related to taking a screen shot.

Scenarios included with the game range from the Soviet invasion of Finland, to Russian German combat in front of Moscow, Kasserine (and the WWII baptism of fire of the 1st Infantry Division), Snipe (the defense of the 7th English Rifle Battalion who happened to be in the way of the main German attack on Kidney Ridge), and the Italian Invasion of Greece. Campaign games include France 1940, Normandy, and the Battle of the Bulge. I expect that this is only a partial list and others will be forthcoming.

Command and control

Players can command units ranging in size from a platoon (four or five vehicles or squads) up to battalion level. The user interface is easy to grasp. Orders are given via a series of buttons. Players select units to move by clicking on them and then clicking on their destination. If desired, a toggle can be switched on which displays the limit of advance for each unit. Movement orders can be given to individual vehicles or to the entire formation. Players may attack identified units with direct fire or just shoot into areas where the enemy may lay in wait.

Artillery units can fire preplanned and unplanned missions and smoke. This is a very useful tactic when moving. As with movement, a toggle can be activated to show where units may fire. The player can perform combat in "real time" – meaning simultaneously – or in phases, the more traditional way. Simultaneous play has an excellent feel to it. This option makes the game particularly fast moving and enjoyable.

Tactical air is also included, utilizing planes from Stukas to Medium Bombers. However, the player has no control over them. Players should be able to select a target hex reflecting preplanned air strikes. This randomness severely limits the usefulness of air strikes in the game because you never know where it will go. Gameplay revealed no instances of air strikes hitting friendly troops.

Sights and sounds

Game graphics are excellent; the game does a good job of hiding its hex-based movement system. The units feel as if we are using Micro Armor: as the tanks and other vehicles move, their turrets remain oriented in the last direction the enemy was seen.

Animations are also excellent. Infantry squads shrink in size as they take casualties. Destroyed vehicles and buildings burst into flame and smoke; unfortunately, there are no little infantry bodies lying around. Overruns don't seem to be supported because units always go around enemy units. A bit disappointing, when one of the best places to dismount infantry is on the enemy position itself.

Realism

Because the game is based on ranged combat (also like **Tanks**) real world tactics provide positive pay off. Be careful not to move units out of range of their support, unless the enemy is fleeing the battlefield. In an interesting feature, advancing units do not bother to fire on routed enemy units,

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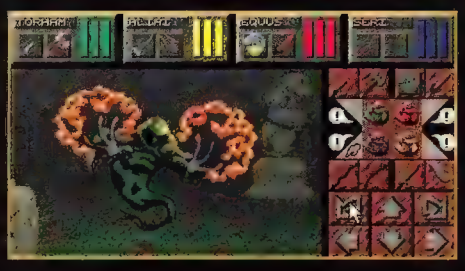

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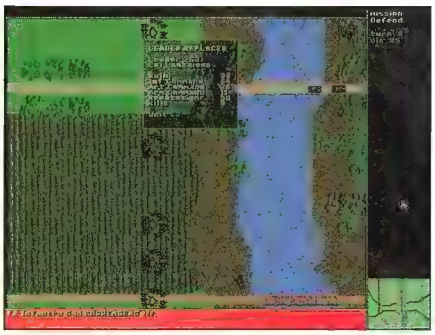
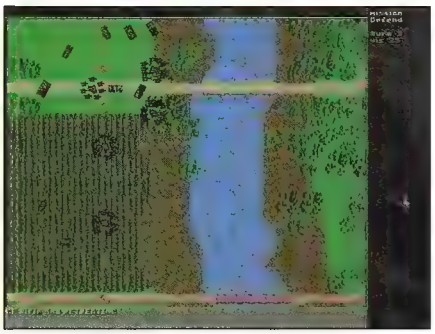
Pick a campaign, any campaign...



Change of command



Bridgehead across the Meuse!

The range of movement

The winning edge

Seizing the near side

even when ordered to do so.

Line of sight is realistic. Units with longer range and concealed can engage without immediately being found. It is very frustrating trying to find an AT gun while watching reconnaissance units getting destroyed by well-aimed fire. Just because the enemy fires at your units doesn't mean you automatically get to see them. The game permits fire into hexes that are likely enemy positions, allowing the player to suppress possible enemy units as his vehicles advance across the field.

An important aspect of small unit combat is leadership. Each unit has a leader with specific characteristics. As the leaders gain experience, their attributes change and they receive decorations and promotions in the campaign game. Their main function seems to be rallying the unit when it is suppressed by fire or retreating. When leaders are killed, a message informs you another leader has taken command.

Buy a battle!

The built in scenario and map editors are excellent, with a feel similar to *SSI*'s **Tanks**! Building a scenario is ridiculously easy. Players merely click on choices as to nationality, time, computer control, and punch the Continue button. Next, the player purchases units based on the tried and true points system.

The game builds the map automatically although the player can edit the resulting product to fit the scenario. There is a large variety of terrain supported in the game. Once the map is finished, you then deploy units. The computer deploys units under its control.

This leads to the game's only shortcoming. Players must purchase and deploy units for every scenario and battle. Each unit has a variety of organizations and mixes of equipment (for example pure PzKw III platoons or mixed platoons of III's and IV's, or a choice of a Mark IV, Panther, or Tiger platoon). Several unit options are provided when buying a tank, infantry, artillery, or other units allowing a realistic mix of equipment as was prevalent in World War II. Historical scenarios should already have units bought and placed on the battlefield, saving player purchase and positioning for custom designed scenarios.

A large number of weapons, tanks, other armored fighting vehicles, trucks, and airplanes are modeled in the game. Many versions of tanks are included: M3 Stuart, M3 Lee, M3 Half-track, PzKw I, II, III, IV, V, and VI to name only a few. Infantry units include marines, engineers, machine gun squads, mortars, and pill boxes. A full range of support weapons such as artillery, AT guns, and air defense artillery are also included. The full spectrum of infantry units is also provided - even assault boats. Many countries are modeled including the US, England, Germany, Japan, Italy, Holland, and even Greece.

On the objective

Victory is achieved in the same old way of destroying enemy forces and occupying objective hexes. The objectives are initially marked with the owner's colors and change when overrun by the enemy. The victory message at this point is somewhat underwhelming, but should improve when the game is fleshed out and in production.

On the other side of the hill?

An expansion bringing the game into the modern era would be a welcome addition to the game. A really neat utility would be a 3-D view from one of the vehicles to give the atmosphere of leaning over the miniature battlefield to determine line of sight from one vehicle to another.

Steel Panthers is a winning game that puts the player in the tank commander's hatch in the great battles of World War II. This looks to be a thoroughly enjoyable game. Players of **Tanks** and **Tigers on the Prowl** will probably be eager to add **Steel Panthers** to their library. If all goes well, players of **Tanks & Tigers on the Prowl** will be eager to add **Steel Panthers** to their library. We predict it will be a "must have" title.

Michael K. Robel

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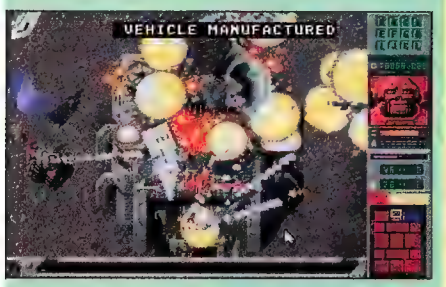
Reader Service No. 72

Diversity, Inc.

From strategy to simulation, adventure to action, Virgin has it all covered. They invited journalists to meet the talent behind the titles. Here's the report.

When a company like *Virgin Interactive Entertainment* calls and asks if you want to come over and check out their new stuff, you go. Period. They have an amazingly diverse lineup, from action games like **Screamer** to space simulations like **Alien Alliance** to the amazing-looking interactive cartoon, **Toonstruck**. The no-shows include, unfortunately, **Heart of Darkness**, which looks so good that Steven Spielberg, *DreamWorks*, *Disney* and *MCA* are apparently interested in turning it into a movie. Since we were actually able to speak to most of the developers of each of these projects, we thought you might be interested in a little information about them too.

Who
The Bitmap Brothers
What
Z



England's *Bitmap Brothers* are well known in The Isles for their action games for the Amiga, such as **Xenon** and especially **Speedball 2**. The all-action, all-exploding strategy game **Z**, which is their first PC-only title, is looking like it has the potential to be a sleeper hit. Most, if not all, of the journalists present named it as one of the best games shown. *Bitmap* representative Eric Matthews, who's not only *not* related to anyone else at the company but regrettably isn't an actual Bitmap, explained that a game like **Warcraft**, which **Z** will most likely be compared to, is OK but too much time is spent sitting back waiting for things to be built. *BB* designed their game instead for maximum playability and constant action, with the added bonus of making *every single object* destroyable. When things blow-up (people included), they don't just explode in a nice ball of fire, either. No, the pieces fly up in the air (toward the screen – they get larger, then smaller), and land all over the screen. When 20 troops armed with grenades descend upon a few tanks, the screen literally fills with carnage. The graphics can be either regular VGA or SVGA, the sound is all digital, and the cut scenes are full of beer-swilling, foul-mouthed macho robots. This is definitely one to watch for. Look for a full preview in an upcoming *Strategy Plus*.

Who
Graffiti
What
Screamer

Though the Italian team creating the game weren't there to wow us with their command of the English language, the actual game was there with two completed tracks in place. Yowza. Pure and simple, **Screamer** is **Ridge Racer**-style arcade racing with no pretenses toward realism. Oh sure, there are *some* physics on your car (six available), and the tracks sorta look like something in the real world (again, six tracks available). While it may not be real, it's is a complete blast to play. Using a **Virtual Pilot** to drive, the control was smooth, and the full-screen VGA graphics were nothing short of spectacular. Like the arcade games, multiple views are available – cockpit, chase mode, helicopter, and full-screen. Best of all, the game will ship with a multi-player option, so you'll be able to recreate the **Daytona** experience when you link six computers up over a network.

Who
Image Space Inc.
What
Zone Raiders

This is what happens when a respected simulations company decides to go gaming. *Image Space* has designed auto and aircraft simulations for corporations such as *Mercedes Benz*, *GM*, *Ford* and *McDonnell Douglas*. With **Zone Raiders** they've crafted a 3D driving and combat simulation with a definite **Hi-Octane** sort of vibe. There *is* a story here, something about a futuristic society and people who break into the cities to steal stuff, but we'll talk about that some other day. The network play is already working, and driving against another human is a blast (no pun intended). Special words of sympathy go out to *Image Space*'s Gjon Camaj, who made the nearly fatal mistake of noting it was his birthday at the post-dinner drinking party. He was not a happy camper the next day.

Who
Looking Glass Technologies
What
Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri

Strategy Plus' March cover, **Terra Nova** is moving along much more quickly now that **Flight Unlimited** is out the door. All of the video is being re-shot, which is also taking some time, but it looks like the game will be out later this year anyway. Don your battle armor and lead your team on missions that cover varying terrain on different planets. Its main innovation will be its physics modeling of all of the robots, which should prove quite interesting. *Looking Glass*' Richard Flier was unfortunately depressed during the two-day marathon, as immediately after it he was going to be spending 10 exciting days in the heart of Cheeseville (WI) promoting **Flight Unlimited**.

Who
Northstar Studios
What
3-Decathalon
Nicholas Beliaeff

Relive the glorious past of **Track and Field** and *Activision*'s *Atari* 2600 classic **Decathlon** with **3-Decathlon**. Remember this: Tap tap tap tap <SLAM> tap tap tap tap <SLAM>? It may be a bit on the slight side, but there's no denying how outright entertaining it is, particularly with one of the new add-on controllers for the PlayStation which works more like an arcade joystick. Look for a PC version down the road.

Who
Orbital Studios Inc.
What
Alien Alliance

If you're thinking, "Who?" then let's just mention some of the things the people at this company have worked on. AJ Redmer, who demoed the game and serves as its Executive Producer, was one of the original founders of *Maxis*, worked on **SimCity**; others on the project include Karl Buiter (**Hard Nova** and **Sentinel Worlds**), Joe Ybarra (**Alien Legacy**, **Starflight**), people from the original *LucasArts*' SCUMM and flight simulation teams and, finally, some people from a little project called **Falcon 3.0**. The game is an outer space combat simulation, which features not only space action but also extensive land-based mission gaming, with at least a few allowing you to enter the water and fight there. One major

difference in this game is how it approaches promotions. As you increase in rank, the game changes 100%. You start as a wingman and move to squadron leader; eventually, you'll find yourself running the whole show, at which point you don't even necessarily have to hop into battle. This looks more like **TIE Fighter** than a **Wing Commander**, and to be quite honest, even at this stage of development its design is superior to either one of them. We'll be previewing this one *very* soon.

Who
Papyrus
What
IndyCar Racing II

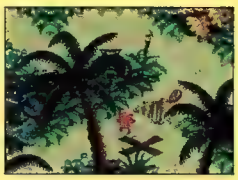
Ann-Marie Gianantoni was demoing this sequel on an *Apple* Macintosh, which is the first sign that something is different. It will be available for the Mac, DOS and Windows platforms. The biggest improvement is the addition of an SVGA mode. The drivers and sponsors reflect the 1995 season and it will be compatible with *Papyrus*' upcoming multi-player on-line network.

Who
Trilobyte
What
The 11th Hour

As *Trilobyte*'s Jane Le Fevre types GO, we finally get to see the final version of **The 11th Hour**. She had purchased a *Packard Bell* PC at a local Costco to demonstrate that their install program would work on any PC. It auto-detects all hardware and software, and in fact will actually search out other titles from other companies and use *their* configurations (assuming those titles are actually working). As the intro movie starts, we remained skeptical about the claims of "30 frames per second video, 24-bit color, 640x320 resolution" etc. After watching said intro, the only thing we could offer was, "erm, wow?" It's all true. 30 fps video with – and here's the amazing part – *absolute clarity*, with none of the artifacting and compression noise in the films. There were scenes with tracking shots, one with a motorcycle riding past a field with fences, and all of the other things you're *not* supposed to film because of problems with compression.

Who
Virgin Studios
What
Toonstruck

Neil Young, VP of product development (and who seemed to be confused by the regular requests he play "Cinnamon Girl") showed us some of the products which are done in-house at *Virgin*. For **Toonstruck** we visited the green-screen studios where Christopher Lloyd was filmed for this upcoming adventure. We also visited the rooms where the artists worked, where they turn pencil sketches into airbrushed paintings and finally digital representations. We watched as they filmed the entire batch of us in the room, and then placed *us* in one of the scenes of the game. So now we can say we've acted with Christopher Lloyd, which may or may not be a cool thing to have done.



Tri-Tryst
What would Windows 95 be if it didn't have a wealth of puzzle games? One of the first will be **Tri-Tryst**, which is yet another variation of a **Tetris**-style "remove blocks from the screen" game. While perhaps not scoring many points for originality, it *is* incredibly playable and features an attractive, uncluttered look. A multi-player network option is available.

Spot Goes to Hollywood
This gorgeous platform-style isometric action game takes *7-Up*'s Spot through a bunch of movie themed areas, from a pirate ship to a horror movie set. Spot can fly on a broom, control a tank straight outta **Tron** and ride in a mine cart that would be right at home in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Though it's going to be made available primarily for the next generation consoles, we were also told it's *really* easy to do this sort of game under Windows 95.

Hyper 3D Pinball
The developer had the best excuse we've ever heard for missing a demonstration and letting the product get behind schedule – he was impaled by a spike after a car accident. Despite this, a *Virgin* representative demoed the product and it's, well, pinball. The graphics are excellent and the ball physics seem fairly accurate, but it's still early. The sound is particularly good too, with each table featuring a theme that is carried through to the effects.

Who
Westwood Studios
What
Monopoly

Joe Kucan of Westwood – you wanted a cover? Yeah buddy, right...

As if they need an introduction, the jewel in *Virgin*'s cap *Westwood Studios* were showing not **Lands of Lore II** but **Monopoly**. At first we thought, "**Monopoly** with **3D Studio** rendered pieces? And?" But color us impressed instead when *Westwood*'s Joseph Kucan, Producer and world famous as the Bald Guy from all those **Command & Conquer** pictures, showed us all of the really cool things in the game. We were on the phone back to the home offices to accumulate enough information on the game for the preview on page 22. Best of all was the dinner, where we were all riveted by Joe's explanations of the benefits of shaving one's head, though regrettably we couldn't convince Ann-Marie of *Papyrus* to shave her head to test the claims made.

Who
Xatrix
What
Cyberia2

The sequel to last year's well-received shooter will feature the usual improvements – more action, more gameplay, more things to blow up, etc. What was perhaps most interesting about visiting their studio is the fact that, despite the fact that much of the game is a pre-rendered shooter, each of the locations are actually complete 3D models which can be walked through using a *Silicon Graphics Workstation*. In the new game, there will be more emphasis on action and less on adventure, but best of all you can shoot almost everything. *Xatrix* are also looking to go beyond PC gaming by building a prototype LBE (Location Based Entertainment) virtual reality ride which we were able to sample. The device they've built uses a *Silicon Graphics Reality Engine* and hydraulic struts to move about an enclosed cockpit. Inside, you're closed off with only a large monitor and a controller. The whole unit moves much like the *Back to the Future* ride at *Universal Studios*. It reminded us of **MegaRace**, only it wasn't a game – yet. There is a ton of potential here, though, if they can get the costs and complexity down.

Steve Bauman

Origins 1995: A report from the Philly Phront

Ahh, Philadelphia in the midst of a July heat wave. What could be finer? Well, actually, it was a great place to be – the site of 1995 ORIGINS, the National Wargaming Convention, the soft pretzel and the cheese steak. Located in the new Convention Center, it was an affair to remember; while the auction site required a guide and golf cart for timely access, the rest of the exposition was centrally located, and there were a surprising number of wargamers (in fact, the Magic/wargaming factions seemed to be evenly divided). Attendance was up (probably c.6,000) after some mediocre attendance in the Western sites, and it is likely that the East Coast will see more of this event in the future. Next year's site will be either Pittsburgh, PA, Columbus, OH or Charlotte, NC.

Computers are given a mediocre emphasis at ORIGINS, although a network of computers was available for those seeking a quick fix of **DOOM** or other first person shooters. Only a few computer companies actually made an appearance, and they included: *HPS*, *Avalon Hill*, *SSI* (and *Erudite Software*), *Australian Design Group*, *TalonSoft*, *SSG*, and *Arsenal*. While *Wizards of the Coast* (of *Magic* fame) was present, *MicroProse* did not make an appearance (although they are located only 100 miles away and are designing the computer version of the ubiquitous card game).

HPS (408 554-8381, 3-5 PM Pacific Time): Scott Hamilton premiered the release of **Panthers in the Shadows**, his World War II Western Front (Europe/Mediterranean/North Africa) follow-on to **Tigers on the Prowl**. A one-man mini-industry, Scott makes no apologies about designing for the grognard. **Panthers** includes 1500 weapons systems and 500 gun platforms in a complex simulation "not recommended for first-time gamers." A detailed review will be forthcoming, but it is refreshing to see a designer addressing his market and not attempting to be all things to all people. Scott also distributes **Road From Sumter to Appomattox** and **Remember the Alamo**. The sequel to the latter game (a simulation of George Custer, the Seventh Cavalry and a cast of thousands of Indians) should be released within the next two months. Finally, Scott noted that he is working hard on **Aide-de-Camp II**, and hopes for a release early in 1996.

Avalon Hill: The Grand Old Man of board wargaming, *Avalon Hill* made an impressive foray into computer wargaming in 1994 with such programs as **Kingmaker**, **Flight Commander 2**, **Operation Crusader** and **Stalingrad**. With an announced release schedule second to none in the computer wargame industry, it appeared that a new tradition was being forged. However, personnel turbulence and persistent rumors about possible sale of the company itself (which recently appeared in the Baltimore papers) seem to have slowed down the cornucopia of games. **Blackbeard** has been sent back for additional development, while **Wooden Ships & Iron Men** seems to be a distant dream. **Beyond Squad Leader** develops its own rumors and delays, but Jack Dott insists that **Third Reich** will be released in the September-October time frame.

Strategic Simulations, Inc.: sharing a booth with the boardgame company *GMT*, *SSI* was showing demos of **Silent Hunter**, **Steel Panthers**, **Rifles** and **Alexander**. In an open seminar, the *SSI* representatives noted a release schedule of:

- **Steel Panthers** (a tactical Eastern Front design by Gary Grigsby) in September;
- **Rifles** (a tactical simulation of conflict between 1848-1905 by Norm Koger) in October;
- **Silent Hunter** (a Pacific War submarine simulation) in November;
- **Allied General** (the sequel to **Panzer General**) in November;
- **Great Naval Battles IV** (Atlantic, Mediterranean and Baltic) in November;
- **SU-27** in November (which is probably an optimistic release date at best!);
- **Alexander** (ancient warfare) in January 1996;
- **Panzer General II** (with design-your-own campaigns and research-and-development options) in mid-late 1996.

Within 6-9 months, *SSI* expects all of its products to be designed for WIN 95 only. However, the representatives assured the audience that each program will have its own feel and look, and will not be "Windows generic."

With the success of **Panzer General**, *SSI* is naturally exploring sequels; possible future designs include **Civil War General**, **Pacific War General/Admiral**, **Science Fiction General** and **Fantasy General**.

Erudite Software: Based on Mark Herman and Richard Berg's **Great Battles of Alexander**, the computer version is attempting to replicate the rich historical background and texture of the boardgame. The paper *Great Captains of History* also includes *SPQR* (Republican Rome) and *Julius Caesar* (early Imperial Rome). If **Alexander** is successful, we can expect to see the others follow onto the computer. Lead programmer Dan Masterson showed me his latest iteration. Using multiple window viewing (yes, it is a Windows game), I could view both strategic and tactical aspects of the battlefield. Accessing units leads to a **Panzer General**-like shading of movable hexes. I noted that determining facing was often difficult, and Mr. Masterson agreed. A modification may actually portray two arrows showing the hexes into which a "live" unit could move. Each infantry unit portrays six men while the cavalry shows four horsemen; cohesion losses reduce the number of "men" visible. I had some problems determining the leader, and suggested that the leaders be shown on white or black horses (the cavalry is normally mounted on browns).

But the game looks interesting. The artificial intelligence will use a scripted battle plan, which is accurate, since ancient warfare was somewhat akin to the British Fighting Sail instructions of a later era in terms of initiative. Much of the boardgame will be replicated, but the following options have been deleted: line commands, stacking, column movement, pre-arranged withdrawal. Orderly withdrawals are limited to the first opportunity, and routing is now fully handled by the computer.

In addition, a print option of the scenarios should be offered in the final version, while a scenario editor is under consideration (although it is more likely to be a second release). I discussed

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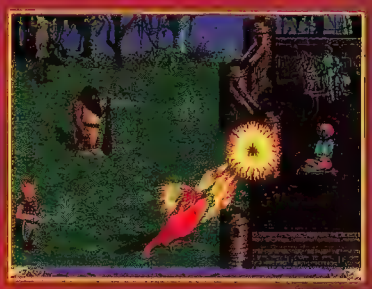

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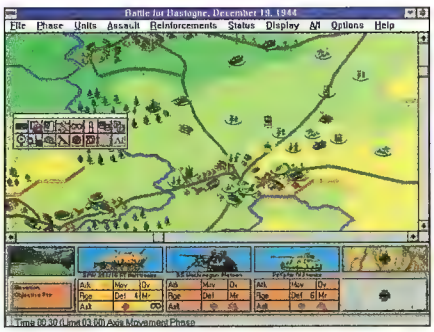
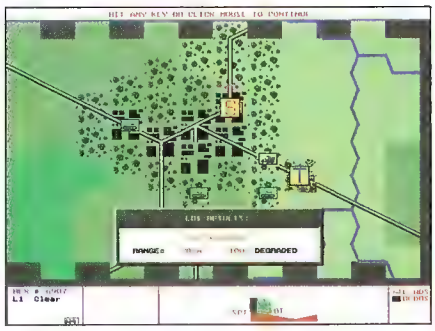
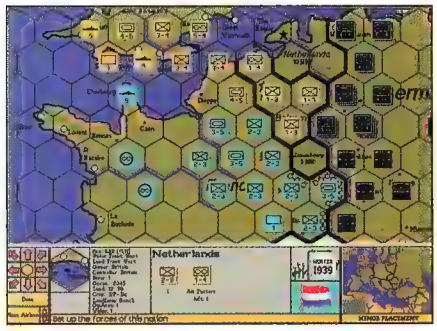


TalonSoft's Battleground: Aredennes



HPS'S Panthers in the Shadows



Avalon Hill's Third Reich

this with *GMT*'s Gene Billingsley, and suggested that a special discount be offered to computer purchasers for them to secure the boardgame version. The paper version will allow the user to understand the details of the rules and combat modifiers, and a synthesis of both aspects of wargaming can only be beneficial.

I plan to keep tabs on this one, and am currently reading Hackett's *Warfare in the Ancient World*, Arrian's *Campaigns of Alexander* and Fuller's *Generalship of Alexander the Great*.

Australian Design Group: The "sleeper" of the convention; *ADG*'s boardgame classic *World in Flames* is being converted to the computer. The computer version will be **Fifth Edition Plus**, and will include **Asia Aflame**, **Africa Aflame**, **Planes in Flames**, **Ships in Flames**, and **Mech in Flames**. This is a *complete* World War II: European and Pacific Theaters! The screen shots of the maps yield a faithful rendition of the paper map; the program has a huge potential. The designer is hoping for an October/November release. This may be optimistic, but I have to admit that I was enthused by this one!

TalonSoft: Jim Rose was showing **Battleground Ardennes** to interested passersby, and the passersby were definitely interested. Perhaps the most fascinated observer watched his preteen son play the computer for eight hours; he noted that his son suffered from an attention deficit disorder, and that this was the longest he had ever seen his son engaged by anything. Therefore, he planned to purchase a computer just for the game; one rarely achieves a more enthusiastic endorsement.

Arsenal: Jim DeGoey, Major Holdridge and Ed Raines were allowing continuous plays of **TacOps** to the crowd, and there was rarely an open seat. **Panzers East** was also shown; hopefully, the PC versions will be forthcoming shortly.

SSG: SSG had an observer present, but no demonstrations or products available. **Warlords II** seems to be getting most of *SSG*'s emphasis, while Ian Trout's illness seems to have had a debilitating effect on corporate output. We wish him a speedy recovery and look forward to *SSG*'s **Battle of the Bulge** simulation.

Finally, *Spearhead*'s John Vannore is considering a computer implementation of **Bodyguard/Overlord**, a John Prados design of deception and intelligence gathering operations concerning the cross-channel invasion in 1944. Still in early planning stages, this paper design was a rarity in that it concentrated on strategic and operational intelligence operations as opposed to fire and maneuver.

Overall, it was an interesting time. And as a final challenge: the undefeated Down in Flames team of Evan Brooks and Peter Perla look forward to meeting all comers next year! (P.S.: J.D. Webster gets a bye; he needs it!!)

M. Evan Brooks

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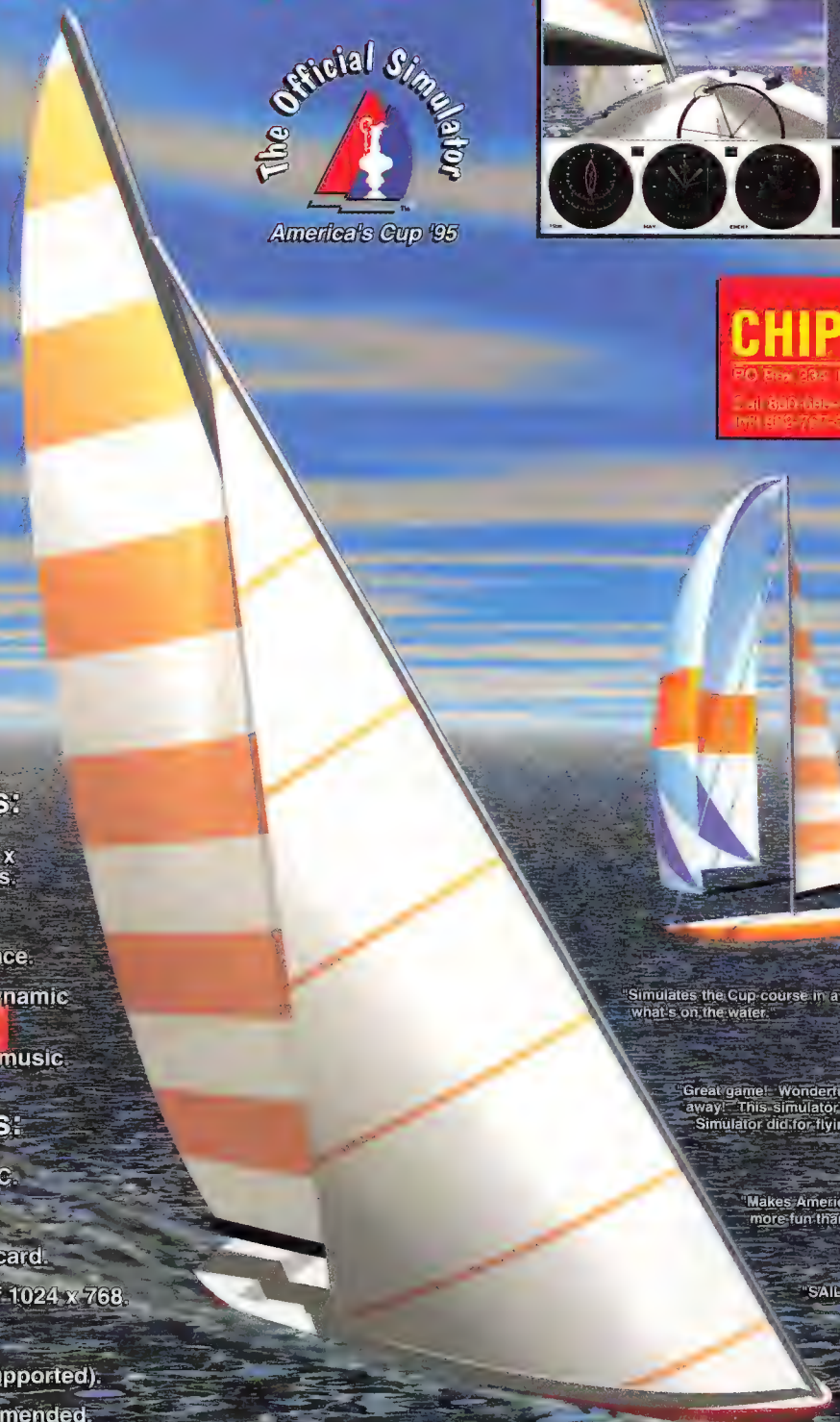

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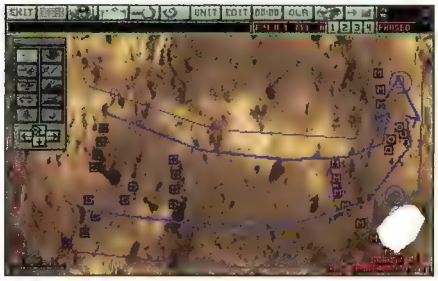
Attack!



Here's the plan

"Sit down where you can see the map. First, I want you here, Second, next to him and Third, right there. XO and FIST over there on the edge. Top, I'm dyin' for a Coke, but I'll settle for some of that weird milk. Thanks. OK, here we go."

"Here's the enemy situation. There's an enemy motorized rifle company on Objective Spear at 100% strength. We don't know what unit they are, but they do have BMPs and T-80s. They're dug in behind some mines which we think are here. The enemy regimental combined arms reserve is on Objective Sword 3. I expect the enemy to defend.

"The friendly situation is the battalion attacks at 251800 September to destroy the enemy forces on Objectives Spear and Sword to penetrate the enemy defense and pass the third battalion of the brigade through. If we are successful, I expect the division commander will pass the reserve brigade through the gap we create.

"A company is on our left (north). D Company in the south. B's in reserve. We're going to create a penetration for B to push through and go deeper to the battalion objective. A will overwatch our movement and suppress the enemy platoon to the north. D Company attacks to our right to destroy the southern platoon and widen the gap to the south. We've got priority of fire from battalion and battalion has priority of fire from brigade. Artillery fire is planned for the area here (white area).

"We'll start in V formation with 1st leading. 3rd (M3's) will overwatch from here in the north. Second will generally follow 1st, staying to the right rear to provide support. 1st platoon will move from their current positions to Checkpoint C. Once there, suppress the enemy platoon on our objective. Once 1st is on C, then the rest of the company will move along the route CP A - B - D. After we have destroyed the enemy platoon, we'll continue the attack north to destroy the next platoon up there. Once we're done with that, we'll overwatch B's move through. A will follow B. Then we follow and provide support to Alpha.

"FIST, once 1st is on CP C, I want you to call for DPICM on the enemy platoon. It's essential that you keep the battalion mortar platoon firing on target 2 (the cloud) to ensure the enemy there can't shoot at us. I'm counting on you. 2nd, I want you to watch that area closely. If the smoke screen starts to thin and there's enemy there, take them out before they hurt us or Delta.

"Top, stay one terrain feature behind us. Once we get up on the objective, get up there fast with the M88 and the ambulance. We won't worry about resupplying until we're set on Sword, sometime after dark.

"The call signs and frequencies won't change until we're on Sword and the battalion is consolidated. Succession of command is CO, XO, 1st, 3rd, 2nd, FIST, and the 1st Sergeant.

"Any questions?"

"Sir, can we go south of the boundary?"

"Nope, if we wander off that way, Delta'll shoot at us. Recognition at night is damn hard. That's why the boundary runs along that ridge, in order to provide an easy to recognize feature between us and them. Same thing in the north."

The FIST asked, "Who'll call for Artillery fire on Spear 2?"

"I will. If I can't 1st will, and if he can't, you will. Call for it when 1st is up on CP C."

"How sure are we about those mines?"

"Not sure at all. The S-2 says that's where they should be. He's been wrong before. If they're there, we'll do an in stride breach. I don't want to stay there and mess around. FIST, I'll be counting on you to get smoke onto us if we do get caught in a minefield."

Third Platoon asked, "Why can't we just use our on board smoke?"

"Well, in the first place, if you use your own smoke, it's just a shoot me sign. Second, it'll probably just confuse the issue in the minefield. Remember FIST, put the smoke between us and the enemy so we're not in it, and make sure of the wind direction. If you have to use your own smoke, back up into it. Don't go forward. And don't use it against aircraft. It just makes it easier for them to see us."

"Anything else? Fine, let's get some chow and get to your tanks. We've got a long day ahead of us."

Because **Armored Fist** only portrays a reinforced company team, we have to include some artificialities in order to develop a good scenario. The main one is the size of the enemy force. From our earlier column on defense, we know that threat platoons only defend as part of a company, but if we put a company into the scenario, it will clean our clocks. The second platoon would be where the smoke cloud is and the third just off the map to the north. By using only one platoon, we can pretend that the rest of the battalion is doing their job.

In order to play fair and replicate the fact that the company does not attack along, some restrictions have to be placed in the scenario. After all, if the company wanders all around the map, than there is no real challenge.

The mines in the diagram don't show up until they are discovered by running over them, which is the least desired method of doing so. Of course, the probability of one tank hitting any one mine is low...but there are lots of mines. They are shown here just about how they would be laid out, about 1,000 meters away from the enemy position in order to hold the attacker at the optimum engagement range for destruction. The others are there to drive the company down into the fire sack - an unpleasant thought.

This should be a tough scenario even with so few enemy forces (they are dug in, so they're a little harder to see and hit). I typically lost four tanks. In the third figure, the overwatching platoon has been destroyed and the company is going around the corner. The next move is to get the trailing platoon up onto CP C to provide overwatch for the lead platoon.

If the scenario is too hard, remove the Hinds, which are really pesky, or don't dig in the enemy tanks. Digging them in makes them much harder to see and hit, especially since the turret controls in the game are not as responsive or as fine tuned as they should be. A joystick with a hat switch on it makes a big difference here. If the enemy places effective fire on your vehicles, back down and get turret down, change the magnification on the site to 10X and come back up. Make sure it is a different place than before or the enemy'll nail the tank.

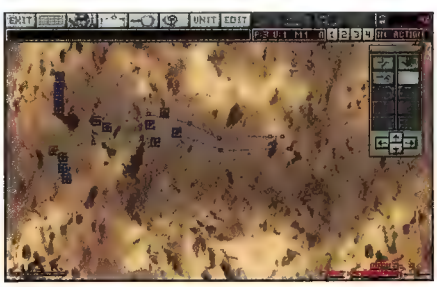
Listen for the word "missile" or the rattle of 30mm BMP automatic cannon. That is the clue to pop smoke and back down the slope. In the open turn on both the engine smoke and pop the smoke grenades. That should provide enough concealment to get to a safe place. Don't go through it because that just silhouettes the tank to the enemy.

Playing from the tank is dangerous. Remember, in this game we're the company commander and not really in for the direct fire fight. Playing from the map is unsatisfactory from a gaming point of view, but at least you can maintain situational awareness. Some play from the tank is necessary because that is the only place players can request air and artillery from.

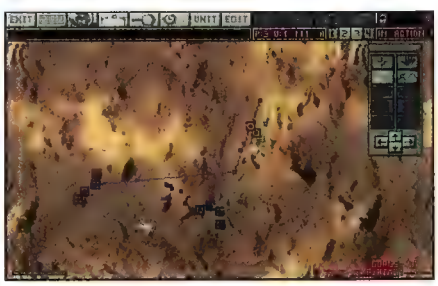
Across the Rhine looks like it will fix some of these problem. It displays the "in the tank" view and the map view simultaneously. In addition, while the player can leap from tank to tank, if his own tank gets hit, he's out of the game.

Next, we'll turn the tables and take out a motorized rifle company in the assault. Until then, good shooting.

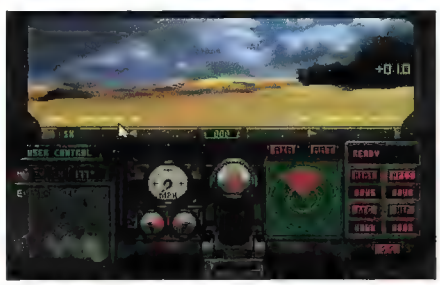
Mike Robel



MOVE OUT!



Nothing is simple, the problem of the destroyed overwatch



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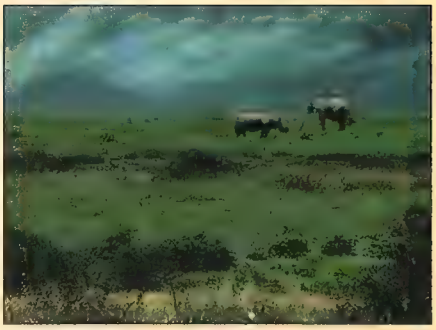
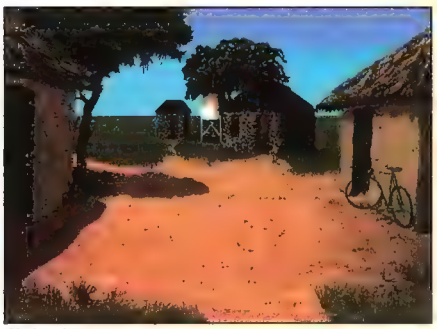
Reader Service No. 101

ECO East Africa

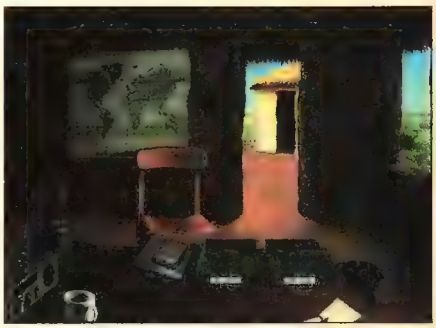
Bureaucracy in the bush



No, I'm not a rhino, son. Get away from me!



Ah, headquarters.
The door to the left leads to the office.



A gamewarden's best friend — his desk!
What? No mail, today?

PARK IMPROVEMENTS
Possible Additions
Cost
Days to Build
- Headquarters TSH 5000 15
- Ranger Stations TSH 1000 5
- Science camps TSH 2000 10
- Tourist camps TSH 4000 30
- Airstrips TSH 1000 20
- Water Tanks TSH 1500 20
- Grass land
AVAILABLE FUNDS: TSH 20000
CONSTRUCTION COST: TSH 16500
RELOCATION COST: TSH 0
BALANCE: TSH 3500

Drag the headquarters icon to the map to build it.

You'd think the life of a game warden in Africa would be exciting and filled with adventures: rearing orphaned lion cubs; meeting famous macho writers on safaris, or rescuing the odd drunken tourist from an elephant herd, maybe; but not Lee Barnes and Christopher X. Thompson, the creators of **ECO**. According to them, a game warden is just another harried bureaucrat who spends most of his time behind a desk, answering mountains of correspondence, hiring personnel, soliciting funds and promoting tourism.

At least, this is what the game warden in their new CD simulation does. One can play it as a tourist or warden. There is nothing to do as a tourist except look at short video clips of wild animals. Tourists can only explore the preserve, which consists of mountains, lakes, rivers and plains, and watch the animals in their natural habitat. Time goes by an hour every five seconds and the sun sets and rises (there is an <F> key command to speed quickly through the pitch black nights). The graphics are spectacular, but we've seen it all before on the *Discovery* channel or in the movies *Hatari* and *Born Free*. The experience is also not unlike paging through an issue of *National Geographic* and looking at the pretty pictures.

The opening screen allows you to choose either a game warden's journal or a park brochure. Choose the brochure and you're a tourist. Choose the journal and you are immersed in the ecosystem of Ethemba as its new game warden. The old game warden was shot by poachers.

Ethemba is an ecosystem out of balance. Poachers are running wild. The animals are practically non-existent. Tourists are avoiding the place like the plague. There are no science camps, ranger stations or medic camps – not even a headquarters!

The first thing the warden must do is build a headquarters (preferably in an area that isn't prone to flooding). Once an HQ is available, the warden can go to his/her office and sit at a desk. There s/he can order supplies. Then s/he must spend some time just traveling around Ethemba before coming back to the office to find a large amount of mail to answer.

Some of the letters will be from hunters, some from job applicants, others from organizations wanting more information to help them decide whether or not to help Ethemba financially. Every letter must be answered (there are a number of form letters to select from, and a rolodex that fills in names). The warden's budget is extremely limited, and s/he must encourage everyone to donate.

After hiring personnel, the warden needs to build facilities and order more supplies for them. Eventually s/he needs to buy jeeps, boats and planes so the rangers can better keep the poachers under control.

There is no real time interaction with the animals or staff in this game. Everything is handled by filling out forms.

The interface is at times complicated or awkward. All traveling must be done in travel mode. A little yellow icon on a map is placed at a new destination, then left clicked on, and then right clicked to enter the location. Once a headquarters is built, a cluster of buildings appears in the location. Click on the cluster for a close-up view. Click on the doorway of the building to the left to enter. Click on the desk to begin work.

Sometimes, after placing the yellow icon, the location selected didn't appear. My HQ was lost several times. It's very disconcerting to lose a headquarters, to say the least, since most of the game is played there. Left clicking brings up a compass, and sometimes the HQ can be found again by clicking on various directions near the location initially selected.

The trigger for the all-important mail is also initially a mystery. You can save the game, travel all around Ethemba, come back to the office to see if anyone's come by with the mail – to no avail. Load the saved game and the postman arrives like a miracle. Weird.

There is little documentation for **ECO**. The same brief information that's in the short manual appears on-line in a help file.

To be fair, **ECO** is a well-done, realistic and off-beat simulation, which is really all it sets out to be. It's just not much fun to play. I already know how to jockey a desk. When I'm playing games on my computer I want to experience something much more exciting. Simulating the life of a bureaucrat isn't my idea of a good time.

Thumbs down on this one. If you need an African fix, go to the zoo.

Andy Backer

Designed by: **Lee Barnes and Christopher X. Thompson**
Published by: **IVI Publishing**
Systems: **IBM PC**

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Stars!

Space, The Final Frontier

An "unscratchable" itch has existed in my mind for several weeks. Fondly remembering **Spaceward Ho! II**, I have been yearning for the new Windows version. After trying unsuccessfully to reach the itch with **Master of Orion**, I stumbled upon **Stars!**, a new shareware release from *Star Crossed Software*. **Stars!** has proven a handy backscratcher ever since.

Stars!, in the tradition of 4X games, aims directly at **VGA Planets**. Starting on a single planet, you must explore, exploit, expand and exterminate the other players in order to win. Victory is declared when one player substantially dominates the game.

The shareware release lets you look at all the elements of the registered version, while restricting the human tech levels and race choices. The main features of the full release are a race creation module (*finally* somebody seems to be paying attention to what we virtual space emperors have been begging for for years) and six additional levels of technological development.

While the full version offers tech levels beyond those in the shareware version, there are no further new items after tech level sixteen. Further levels only serve to reduce the cost of producing old technology.

Up to sixteen players in any mix of human and computer may participate. Players may choose any of several predetermined races or create their own. **Stars!** was obviously designed by people who have read a lot of technical sci-fi, and contains a level of detail more reminiscent of a flight sim, which helps suck players into the game without turning it into a slog-fest.

Creating your own race is one of the best elements of **Stars!**. You can see immediately how detailed this strategic space sim is. After choosing a race name and symbol, you are presented with the environment screen. Players must choose what ranges of temperature, radiation and gravity their race can tolerate as well as their maximum rate of reproduction. You may also choose to be immune to any or all of the three environmental factors, but at a price.

In a method evocative of the *Champions* paper role-playing game, each decision made when designing a race will remove or return points. In succeeding screens you choose details about production, research and special race advantages/disadvantages. Although it's tempting to select all the advantages, players doing so will find themselves severely in the red, necessitating drastic cuts elsewhere.

The interface is easy to become acclimated to and may be custom tailored to match your resolution. Most elements of the screen may be resized, moved or even reduced to a ribbon bar. Left clicking on any item brings up a helpful explanation of the elements in question. There is also an extensive tutorial which gradually takes you through all the details of play, including those shortcuts that make managing huge empires pleasurable rather than a tedious bore.

Ships are organized into fleets and assigned waypoints. Each waypoint may have a task, such as colonize, attack or transport. Repetitive tasks, like using freighters to run minerals from mining fleets back to starbase-equipped worlds, can be set up once and need never be changed again. Because you can give fleet numbers as waypoints, you only have to move the mining fleets to fresh planets as the old mines peter out.

Designing ships is another rewarding feature. First choose an available hull (over two dozen in the full version); then add components. No more than sixteen designs may be in play. Hulls are specialized, being divided into categories for space superiority, planetary bombardment, mining, transport, etc.

Technology mostly benefits ship combat and construction. The majority of developments are either new hull designs or ship components, but there are many systems relating to planetary sensors, defenses and terraforming.

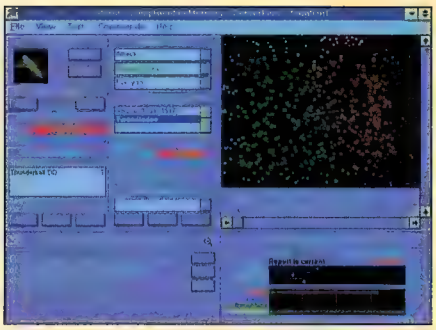
Combat occurs off-screen, with the results appearing in messages. Ship-to-ship combat may be reviewed in greater detail by watching a slide show replay. Fleets are assigned battle plans determining what the four general categories of ships will do when entering battle.

There are a few glitches in this otherwise impressive game. As your empire grows, production becomes more difficult to track. There are also a few places where it is not readily apparent what you are supposed to do when playing the tutorial.

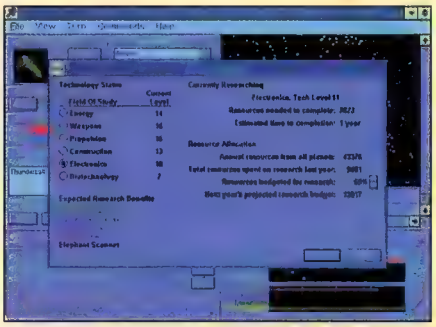
These minor flaws aside, **Stars!** is an excellent game with the appearance of a handmade labor of love which countless hours of play have done nothing to diminish. For any questions or comments, write me online on *GEnie* at Sam.Baker and on *CompuServe* at 72664,3066.

Samuel Brown Baker II

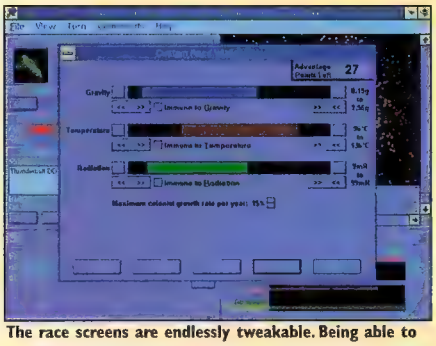
Star Crossed Software may be contacted at 503-451-1635 or at http://www.webmap.com/stars!



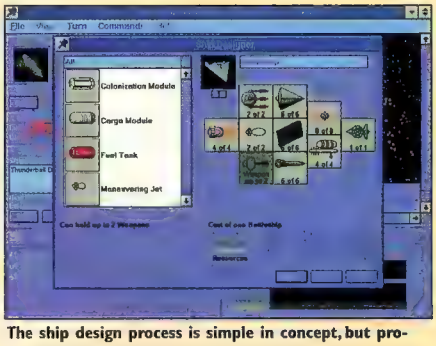
The universe is a very big place and EVERYBODY'S out to get you.



Each of the six fields of study is important and many devices depend on more than one tech area.



The race screens are endlessly tweakable. Being able to tolerate unusual planetary environments can allow players to settle mineral-rich planets.



The ship design process is simple in concept, but promotes much mental debate concerning the role a ship will play in your fleet.

Designed by: **Jeff Johnson and Jeff McBride**
Published by: **Star Crossed Software, Inc.**
Systems: **Windows**

"This ain't no flight sim...this rocks."

"The 3D environments are simply breathtaking... the worlds are like nothing seen before in computer games." –Computer Player

GOLDEN TRIAD AWARD
COMPUTER GAME REVIEW

"This game is best described as a hybrid of **Magic Carpet** and **Descent** – a combination that will delight the vast majority of PC gamers." –Next Generation

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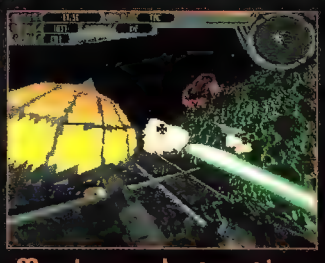
Thundering engines

Insane weapons



Maximum destruction

Features

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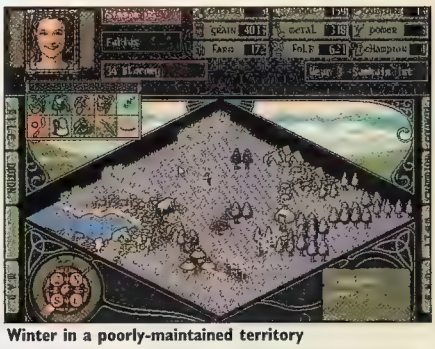
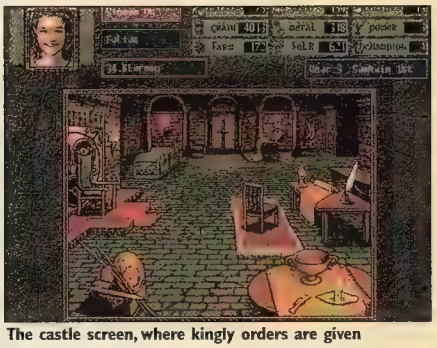
Reader Service No. 7

Celtic Tales: Balor of the Evil Eye

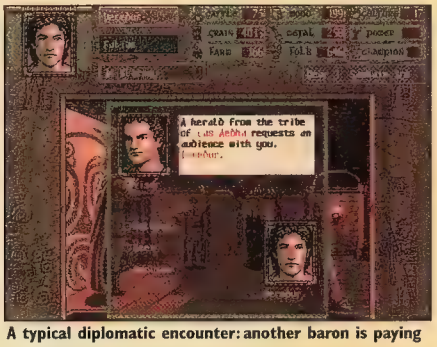
Stare down the opposition and unite the tribes of Eire



Winter in a poorly-maintained territory



The castle screen, where kingly orders are given



A typical diplomatic encounter: another baron is paying me tribute

Koei has long been known in the computer gaming world as a maker of historical and semi-historical strategy games. Their products have traditionally focused on conquest and unification, putting the player in the role of conqueror and restorer of order. Armed with economic and political tools as well as strategic options, the player must fortify and develop his or her lands, conquer new territories, and finally take over the entire game world.

The latest offering from *Koei* is **Celtic Tales: Balor of the Evil Eye**, and it fits well into the existing framework of *Koei* games while at the same time adding some new elements to their usual mix.

Early *Koei* games like **Romance of the Three Kingdoms** are remarkable because of their willingness to borrow from several traditions. The core of the game is the strategy element: the main screen shows a large map of the world supported by information areas detailing the status of the player's lands. Players spend their time consolidating their starting lands, politically as well as economically and militarily, gaining strength until they can expand into another area, then another. The marriage of economic simulation, political model and wargame is unique and exciting.

These early games are remarkable for their mixture of elements, for their multi-player options (though like **Balor**, they only supported one-computer, "hot-seat" games) and for the handling of non-player characters. The player has to assemble a crew of generals, each rated in a variety of areas, and assign them to various tasks: leading attacks, ruling provinces, or heading units in the royal army. The need to assign worthy men to important positions provides a "personnel management" aspect to the games; despite the fact that the characters are represented with only a name, portrait and an assortment of statistics, you're still left with the impression you're dealing with other human beings.

Balor, initially, appears quite different from these early games. Most noteworthy is a new look: instead of the world map of old, the main screen is now an attractive isometric view like that in **Populous**, depicting the player's current territory in somewhat symbolic terms: a small fortress acts as a gateway to kingly commands, a town provides other options, and so forth. Generals stand on the map and perform the tasks required of them: tell them to mine and they swing the pick. Tell them to chop trees or build the city, and they promptly get to work chopping or building. Generals sent on diplomatic missions scurry from the screen, returning in later turns.

There are other differences as well. Generals now have "experience levels," just like characters in a role-playing game, and can improve with time and labor. The graphics are finely done and integral to the game, with attractive Celtic designs and crisp figures. The isometric view reflects the changing seasons; the land is covered with snow in winter, while in summer it becomes verdant.

Also different is the mythos: previous *Koei* tales were based on Asian campaigns and subjects; this game is concerned with the isle of Eire, a land of decidedly Celtic tone.

Battles take place on the main isometric view, as well. Enemies appear in the same little plot of land you've been mining and building in: when you attack a neighbor, you fight in that same view. Units can move around, cast spells, and melee with their troops.

Interesting quirks also abound. Instead of allocating soldiers, each general receives soldiers based on the level of fortification in their land, as well as their charisma. In effect, a general is an army unit unto itself, and by giving him a weapon or moving him around you're essentially improving or moving a whole unit.

Essentially, however, **Balor** is similar in play to earlier *Koei* efforts. The isometric view and enhanced focus on characters makes it seem different initially, but the game engine is still one of land and army development, expansion, and eventually, unification.

That's not to say it's bad. The *Koei* formula is successful because it's fun. Still, while the isometric view adds flavor and graphic interest, it helps to slow down those quick commands which make the earlier *Koei* games so playable. Instead of just hitting a number or two to mine the land, for example, you have to move a general over to the appropriate area and set him to digging.

Though *Koei* has traded playability for some attractive graphics which don't really affect the game engine, you'll still find **Balor** an entertaining game.

Joe Bell

Designed by: **Koei**
Published by: **Koei**
Systems: **PC CD ROM**

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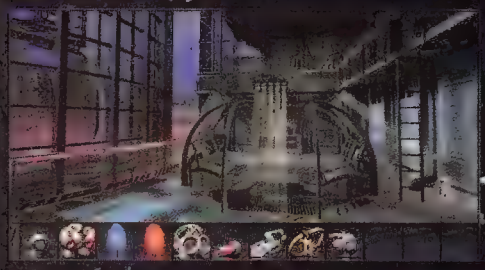

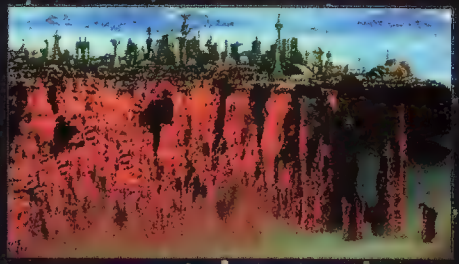

Actual SVGA graphics & animation clips shown

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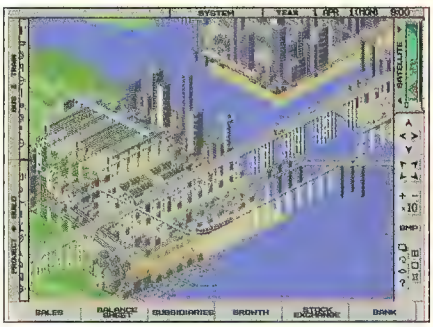
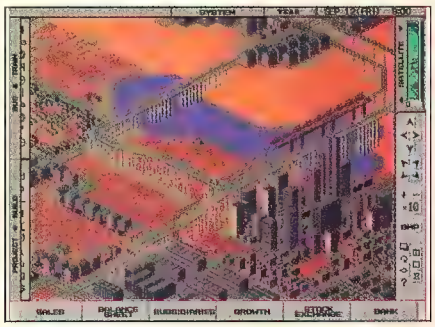
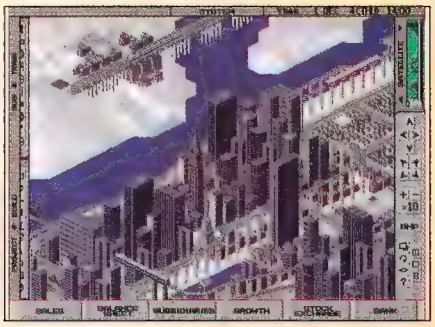


An overview of the city, hinting at the underlying complexity



The surrounding countryside changes to reflect the changing seasons



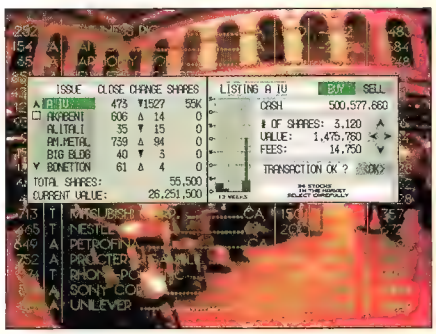
Each of the tabs surrounding the gameplay area pops up to reveal an extensive system of menus

Dwight Owens Barnes is missing, presumed dead, his private jet lost in the sky over the former Yugoslavia. The reins to the world's third largest business corporation, the A-IV Group, are slack, awaiting a new hand. The corporation has a lengthy history of appointing a virtual unknown as its CEO, and has now asked you to apply for the job. Just demonstrate through the efficient running of **CEO** that you are qualified for the position, and the job is yours.

That's the premise to **CEO**, *I-Motion*'s new business-strategy release. Think of it as **Sim City** on steroids. However, as many athletes have found, steroids are not always a good thing.

The game is heavy into the business end of the business-strategy scale. Certainly, strategies must be developed to originally consolidate, then subsequently expand the A-IV Group. Yet, these strategies are entirely dependent on the intricate management of the day to day operations of the group.

For example, let's say you are looking for a short term solution to cash flow problems. Building shops can provide some quick profits. But wait a minute, you can't build shops – or anything else for that matter – without the raw materials. Hmm; back to the rule book. You find that raw materials can either be produced in factories or shipped in via freight trains. Okay, since you don't own enough raw materials to build a factory, you must lay some track.



No business simulation is complete without a stock market

Once the line is built, a train (and attendant cars) must be purchased. Right now, you're probably begging for something simple. No way! **CEO** lets – perhaps the correct term is *makes* – you choose between forty-one models. Now you have the railroad, and the train, with the cars. You scream... "Can I build my frigging shop yet?!" Almost.

Now, my bedraggled gamer, you must place the train on the track and determine its operating schedule. To be fair, the game routine does include default schedules.

This complexity is not necessarily bad. Some will enjoy the intellectual challenge. No doubt, this is certainly an in-depth study of the modern business world.

The game moves in real time, pausing when certain purchase/information menus are selected. As CEO of the A-IV Group, the gamer will be able to control all facets of the conglomerate's many operations. You may build the aforementioned factories, amusement parks, shops, or lodging. Construct roadways, buy buses (there are eleven types), and set schedules. Acquire new subsidiaries, manage your stock portfolio, liabilities, and equity. It's all here in tedious detail.

Scott Givens, *I-Motion*'s Vice President for development, agrees that **CEO** is an intricate game. "Managing the complexity is demanding," states Givens. "However, learning the proper degree of minutiae to control is part of the game's challenge. In the tougher scenarios it is entirely possible to bankrupt the financial empire while fretting over a couple of train schedules."

I-Motion contracted James Coburn to play Dwight Owens Barnes in the introduction and game closing sequences. Kathryn Sparks plays the *CNN* reporter, i.e. herself. Both are naturals; their acting sets the stage well.

When playing, the main screen is dominated by a three-quarter overhead view of the scenario city in question. The building graphics are colorful and sharp. Trains travel the railroads and buses busily traverse the road net.

No way you could call the interface to a game this complex as intuitive. Nevertheless, the folks at *I-Motion* have done all they can to ease the pain. Pull-out, -down, and -up information menus are cleverly placed on all four sides of the screen, providing easy access to the mountains of available information.

Although no bugs were found while running, starting the simulation will be frustrating to all but experienced gamers. Simply put, **CEO** is a conventional memory hog. This, coupled with its extended memory requirements, make booting the game a greater challenge than playing.

Bottom line: **CEO** is a well crafted simulation, yet not for the faint of heart. Givens feels the game's complexity is a strong point. "I like the range of options available to the gamer. **CEO** offers more on the commercial and business side than many previous simulations."

This is certainly not, as the wargamers say, a beer and pretzels game. To play **CEO** well, you must be prepared to spend some time with your conglomerate. Kind of like a real CEO. I just wish the perks were better.

Mark Walker

Designed by: **I-Motion**
Published by: **I-Motion**
Platform: **PC CD ROM**

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New Horizons

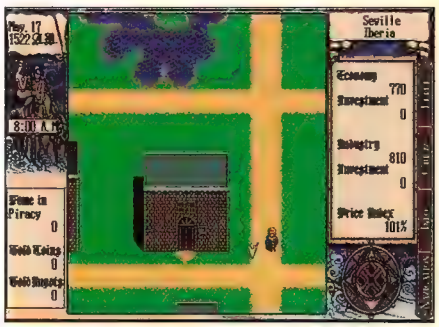
Accept your destiny in Koei's sequel to Uncharted Waters

Sailing the seas

Canvas is cool. The type used for sailing, that is. Games about sailing, piracy, and trade have been on the upswing as of late. First there was **Pirates**. Then **High Seas Trader**. Now *Koei* rejoins the fray with the sequel to **Uncharted Waters – New Horizons**.

Like many other recent releases, **New Horizons** combines elements from three gaming genres: role playing, strategy, and wargaming. The premise is modest, typical, yet enjoyable. The gamer must choose one of six distinct personalities, buy, beg, or borrow a fleet of ships, then trade, blunder, or steal his way to gaming immortality and fortune. Ah, simple in theory, but the reality of the gaming situation is somewhat more of a challenge.

Once the character is chosen, the adventure begins. Most of the action takes place on one of four screens. All are two dimensional and somewhat graphically dated. Yet, and this is a tribute to the strength of the game, I hardly gave the graphics a second glance once captured by the story. The screens will allow the gamer to travel to various shops, pubs, and lodges searching for typical stuff – wine, women, and song – sail the high seas, fight duels, and engage enemy fleets. However, to be effective the drinking, fighting, and sailing must be formed into a game plan.



In town, Seville

War st sea

Strategy – us commoners call it the art of forming stuff into a game plan – is **New Horizons'** prominent gaming strain. The approach you will employ will be significantly affected by the character you chose to play. Beware, these guys (and girl) are more than pretty faces. Each has its own set of victory conditions and must be played accordingly. Joao Franco (son of Duke Leon Franco of **Uncharted Water's** fame) wants to discover Atlantis, Ali Vezas needs to stake his claim in the free trade markets of the world, while Catalina Erantzo craves a good gun battle and the fleeting wealth of a pirate.

Koei's Yoko Yamamoto, **New Horizons'** project coordinator, feels this offering of multiple characters, story lines, and strategies is one of the game's strongest features. "We tried not to limit the gamer. We want them to experiment. In one of the story lines the gamer will even be offered the chance to defect," he says.

These options not only provide the gamer with numerous variations but allow him (or her) to play in a manner which suits their personality. I'm not a trader. Trying to figure out where to buy low so I can sell high drives me nuts. But I like the challenge of sinking a merchant fleet. So I usually play Madame Erantzo where I can blast my way to victory. And speaking of blasting to victory, let's look at **New Horizons'** wargame side of the coin.

Hey, it's never going to replace **Wooden Ships and Iron Men**, but it *is* fun. You may attack any fleet you chance upon. If you so choose, the contestants are transported to a battle screen and the bloodletting begins. The ship to ship combat is turn-based and takes into account many of the relevant factors for warfare in the age of sail. Wind direction, ship type (there are twenty five of them), and manning contribute to a fleet's performance. You may attack with cannon or pull alongside and melee.

However, make sure you have your own weapons in order before coming alongside. If you are offering battle to the opposing side's flagship their Commodore may propose a duel.

The cast of players

If you accept (and the EMS on your computer is enabled) the fight begins. Again, *Koei* has opted for playability versus detail.

The swordplay uses the familiar "I go-you go" format. Moves are of the thrust, parry, and block genre. If you lose, you lose.

Sword play is not the only role-playing facet of **New Horizons**. Each port and village offers the keyboard pounder's personage a chance to meet new and sometimes interesting people, find stuff, and advance the storyline. The supporting cast, which can be critical in the quest for victory, are usually met in bars or occasionally by gossiping with passing fleets. The barflies can be recruited to improve your talent pool. For example, hiring a better navigator will aid navigation.

Additionally, each port holds its own secrets. There are ninety-eight traveler's aids (so to speak) to be found in **New Horizons**. Obviously, it's worth the gamer's while to snoop around in port.

Overall, **New Horizons'** blend of strategy, wargaming and role-playing works well. If you like the sailing-pirate-trader genre you'll enjoy **New Horizons**. It's cool.

Mark Walker

Designed by: **Yoko Yamamoto**
Published by: **Koei**
Systems: **PC CD-ROM**

PowerHouse

Acquire absolute power in Impressions' "energy mogul" game.

You'll need a vigorous R&D department in order to succeed

The main screen, where you'll spend most of your time

Power makes the world go 'round these days. Even in the most remote area, energy is needed to drive all the trappings of modern society. **PowerHouse**, the latest game from *Impressions*, is set in a world where a stronger UN has taken charge and is letting four energy companies compete to see who will ultimately supply the entire world's power needs.

The world has been divided up into a number of different territories, with each covering an area the size of 1/3 to 1/2 of the United States. After a certain percentage of the energy needs of each territory are fulfilled, the UN opens the next territory for further competition.

Each territory is divided up into squares, and each square has different abilities to produce the energy needed by a hungry world. Survey teams are used to find the best locations. They take three turns and survey an area of nine total squares. They cannot scan into unopened territories or under opposing pieces; optimal placement thus requires a bit of planning.

Energy sources in the game range from traditional non-renewable coal, oil and gas, to renewable solar, wave and geothermal as well as several others. Each type is easier or harder to extract and causes a different amount of environmental damage. Sometimes these vary according to the site, though some types, such as nuclear, tend to have the same values wherever they can be built.

This shot shows the many territories waiting for your attention

A successful company must also invest in research and development. Adding more scientists to a specific area can speed up research, but too many scientists can actually waste effort as well. Each advance usually helps make things cheaper or more efficient, though some advances may just be required for later ones.

Since each company takes its turn in order, position within a turn can be important. The computer players are somewhat reserved at the lower difficulty levels, but tend to get quite competitive in the higher difficulty levels, especially if they move before the player.

A standard overhead view of the world is used during play, along with supplementary graphs, tables, and other elements designed to help the player understand just what is happening in this future world. The map of the world can either be based on the Earth, or a new world can be generated by the game.

Managing money is another crucial part of the game. In addition to start-up costs, each facility a company has requires an upkeep fee each turn; failing to plan for this can lead a company into deep trouble. The bank will usually loan you the money needed to keep operating, but overshooting your credit limit three times will force your company into bankruptcy.

Video clips of the Energy News Network (ENN) will occur at various times reporting on what each of the energy companies is doing. These are a bit slow on a single-speed CD-ROM, though they do add some nice color to the game.

It is important to try many different things during play. Many interesting features and options are often hidden below the surface. The manual, while a good basic introduction, lacks the depth to cover all the aspects of the game.

While it has great potential, the reviewed version of **PowerHouse** had several flaws. The worst aspect is the overall slowness of the game. Many parts crawl or are delayed significantly in response time. These time delays become even more noticeable over time, especially in long games with lots of different facilities on the screen.

Other minor flaws mar the surface as well. Hiring, firing, and assigning scientists must be done one at a time, something which can be quite tedious when you want to put several hundred people on a project. The stock market is also basically worthless, since each company has to be checked individually to see if it wants to sell any stock. They never did all the times I checked so I finally gave up even checking.

In spite of these problems, **PowerHouse** does a reasonable job of fitting into the global strategy market. *Impressions* was working on an upgrade when this review was written which was supposed to fix several of the problems noted above, as well as the non-functioning sound and audio effects.

Whether **PowerHouse** is successful will largely depend on how effectively the outstanding problems are fixed. Cosmetic changes will not be enough, but if *Impressions* can speed up the game significantly, and fix the annoying quirks, it will be worth looking into.

R. Bradley Andrews

Designed by: **Impressions**
Published by: **Sierra**
Systems: **Windows**

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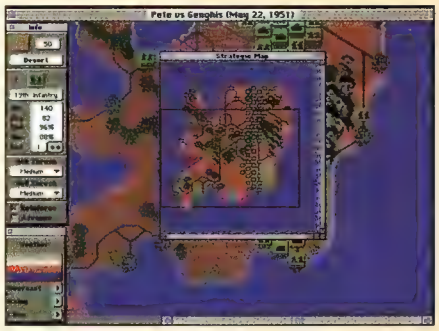
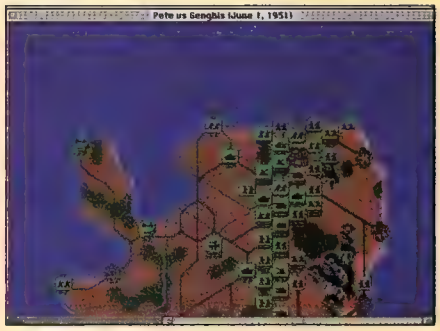
Onslaught

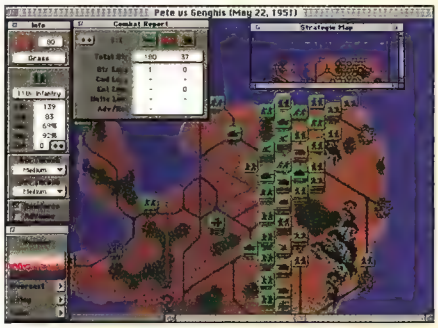
Slugging it out with Frontal Assaultware's *new design*



The strategic map gives you the big picture.



Animations and graphics lean towards the merely functional. Note the battle occuring in the north.



The game interface, showing most of the major windows.

Artillery is best used in mass groupings. A total of six units can occupy a single hex.

Airbases have characteristics of both terrain and units. All air units must be based at an airbase, which itself is bought as though it were a combat unit.

Frontal Assaultware, Inc., the designers of **Onslaught**, are quite up front about the fact that they designed **Onslaught** to be "a warGAME." They made certain sacrifices to realism in the name of making a game that is fun to play. **Onslaught** is a strategic level game of circa-WWII/Korean forces.

Wargamers will have no problems picking up on the mechanics of the game. The map is hex-based (the hexes can be toggled off) and units appear as counters. Each unit has strength and condition attributes, as well as training, experience, and supply levels. Zones of control are in effect, but are a bit quirky. ZOCs do not affect movement, but can disrupt supply to a greater or lesser extent depending on a comparison of the number of enemy and friendly ZOC's influencing a hex. Units are broadly grouped into armor, infantry, artillery and air power. Weather rules have a very real effect.

Into this wargame framework, *Frontal Assaultware* rolled some strategy and resource management issues. Players begin a scenario by buying and placing their forces, as with **The Perfect General**. One difference is that the player can determine the strength of each unit (within limits) as well as its training level. Once gameplay begins, new units can be continually purchased assuming funds are available. Each hex on the map gives the controlling player some amount of income, but cities offer the lion's share. Keeping units maintained (in supply and reinforced) deducts from the player's coffers each turn.

Unit density tends to be quite high, giving the game an almost WWI look (albeit with WWII weaponry). Stacking limits are 500 strength points of ground strength and 500 strength points of air strength, *or* six counters of ground and air units. Artillery can attack from two hexes away; a fact that becomes crucial when attempting a breakthrough. The strongest single ground unit is a full force veteran guards (armor) unit with a strength of 200 points. Since infantry can dig in through five levels of entrenchment, it can become extremely difficult to punch a hole through a line without massive artillery and airpower support.

In any attack, units will have their condition level reduced, and possibly their strength as well. Outright unit kills are fairly rare, unless all retreat routes are cut off. As condition diminishes, so too does fighting ability; strength damage increases at the same time. Weather affects condition as well. For instance, attacking through the mud during rainy weather will increase a unit's condition loss significantly.

In all, **Onslaught** as a gaming system is fairly intriguing. Unfortunately, somewhere along the way the game was lost. Through a series of play balance decisions and system quirks, what should have been a dynamic and vibrant system bogs down.

First, units recover condition with much too much ease. A unit's condition increases at a rate equal to 1/2 the supply level each turn. In fair weather, inflicting over fifty points of condition damage in a single attack round is an extremely difficult feat. Even in the rain it isn't common. So, a unit in supply is very tough to dislodge. The obvious answer is to cut off supply lines, but sources of supply are so plentiful that this, too, becomes quite difficult. Enemy ZOCs reduce supply levels, but it takes many units to completely cut off supply.

An entrenched stack can thus defend almost indefinitely against two full-strength stacks of attacking units. Since unit density allows a solid line of fully reinforced hexes, this causes a very stagnant game to develop. Massive airpower helps, as do airdrops and amphibious landings. Artillery is only really effective if used in full stack groupings, which disallows friendly units moving through hexes occupied by artillery.

And then there's the AI. At best, the computer opponent offers a solid defense to try your skills against. It never launches an effective offensive, since it doesn't seem to make use of air drops or naval assaults. A two player network variation is available to compensate, but modem play is not supported.

In all, **Onslaught** shows promise, but needs a bit more tweaking. Fortunately, *Frontal Assaultware* is one of those developers dedicated to support of their product; two invaluable updates are already available.

As a game system, **Onslaught** is certainly usable. As a game, though – as a challenge/reward situation – it satisfies only marginally. More concrete victory conditions and harsher supply rules would help, as would limiting initial buying power. Since **Onslaught** doesn't attempt to accurately model any specific historical encounter, the only reasonable question to ask is: is it fun to play? As it stands now, the answer to that question would have to be a non-committal shrug.

Peter Smith

Designed by: **Frontal Assaultware, Inc.**
Published by: **Software Holdings, Inc.**
Platform: **Mac (PC to follow)**

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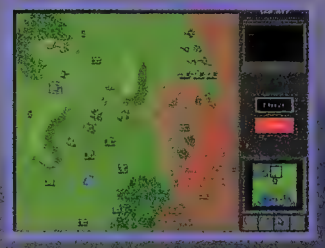

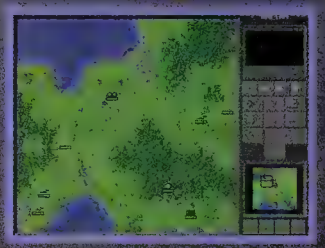

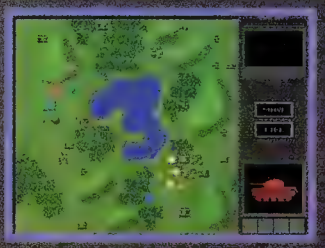

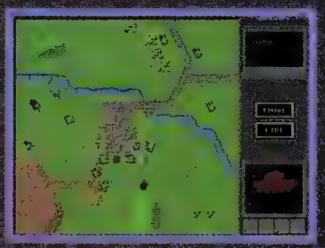

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Zig-Zag

As if we all needed yet another puzzle game to waste away our days and nights, *QQP* have brought us **Zig-Zag**, another painfully addictive puzzler that will certainly cause work stoppages, cramped fingers, and headaches. It's staggeringly simple to learn how to play and equally staggeringly difficult to win most of the games, making it a true puzzle fans dream game.

The computer game **Zig-Zag** is based on a board game called "My Word!" from 1972. After selling a mere 100,000 units, it was reintroduced in 1983 as **Zig-Zag** and has made the "Top 100 Games of the Year" list of *Games Magazine* a number of times. The game resembles the classic **Mastermind.** The object is to solve the computer's four, five, six, or seven letter word and score as many points as possible along the way. You have to form actual words, called test words, and the computer will give you points based upon whether or not the letters in the test word match the word the computer chose. You get 1000 points for a letter in the test word being in the right place in the computer's word and 250 for a correct letter in the wrong place.

The base **Zig-Zag** game also serves as the basis for the various Zig-Zag Quests. In those games you solve **Zig-Zag** puzzles in order to maneuver your way across a map (only *QQP* would manage to incorporate maps into a word puzzle game) without getting trapped or falling in one of the various traps. There are multiple quest boards and various skill levels for both the quests and regular game, allowing the computer to choose from easy to obscure words. High scores are stored for each level. If you somehow get sick of the zillion words the computer has to choose from you substitute numbers for words.

For some people, just having to top your own high score may not be enough to keep them playing the game. This isn't the case for myself, as I could care less what my score is – I just want to beat the stupid thing one more time before I can go to bed. So here it is, 4:00 AM, and I'm sitting here, bleary eyed, starving, exhausted, thinking that it will take only one more game to solve one of these puzzles and I'll be off to bed. Just one more. Ack! Lost again. Am I angry about this? Damn straight, but let me try it one more time and then I'll stop. Just one more. Ack! Lost again. I hate these stupid things. But if I only try it one more time...

Steve Bauman

Designed by: **Castaway Software**
Published by: **QQP**
Systems: **Windows, Mac**

Marco Polo

Marco Polo is an exploration and trading game for one to four players. The game has two levels, short missions and a longer campaign. The short missions range in difficulty from easy to hard and require different times to complete. The campaign game requires many weeks and is quite perilous. You start with a small amount of money and seek to increase your wealth and fame as you journey through the Orient.

Written documentation consists of only two slim, CD-sized manuals. Installation is easy: insert the disk in the CD-ROM – done! The only files that reside on your hard drive are saved games. A nice series of video clips, exotic music, and narration provides historical documentation. However, like most games, the music and limited computer responses become monotonous or irritating after a while.

Playing is fairly easy; moving the mouse brings

up "hot areas" – click on your choice. There are different areas of interest in each town: the Suburbs, where you equip your expedition, and the Town Center, where you buy and sell goods or meet people. Remember to buy supplies, caravan animals, and escort for your journeys. The game's only real strategy aspect is in deploying the different members of your caravan on a grid. Encounters are necessary for gaining information and completing missions. Players respond to questions with only a yes or no, so if you make a mistake, it is easy to fix in the next game.

Most action takes place in the market. Bartering, as in **Lords of the Realm**, is accomplished by clicking on a bid and amount, then accepting or declining the computer's bid. Not every item is on sale everywhere, so you should note the availability of goods, and track the amount you pay for your goods in each town you visit.

Traveling the caravan routes is easy. The game displays a map with your current location and the cities within range. Click on a destination and off you go, sometimes encountering thieves, stopping to loot a battlefield, or engage in battle. In order to plan your route, there is a large scale map showing the entire game area from Acre to the Far East.

An enjoyable game, which reminded me of **The Oregon Trail**, but has more playability and a greater option of choices. Recommended for all ages.

Mike Robel

Designed by:
Published by: **I-Motion**
Systems: **PC CD ROM**

Gettysburg

Multimedia Battle Simulation

Perhaps the most famous battle of the Civil War, Gettysburg has long been of interest to a wide range of people, from military historians to gaming buffs. The **Gettysburg Multimedia Battle Simulation (GMBS)**, a collaboration between *Swfte International* and *Turner Interactive*, attempts to bring the experience of Gettysburg to your **Windows** desktop. **GMBS** started life as *Swfte's* **Gettysburg: An Interactive Battle Simulation** and has been enhanced via a variety of multimedia video clips from *Turner's* Gettysburg motion picture and narration by Civil War historian Shelby Foote.

The game portion of **GMBS** is little changed from the original *Swfte* product. You may take command of either side, controlling units down to the level of individual brigades. The game can be played in either real-time or in a step-by-step mode. The game portrays only three basic unit types: infantry, cavalry, and artillery. As commander of your forces, you issue units a simple set of orders: movement, aiming, (dis)engagement, and entrenching. Much of the minutiae is handled by the computer. Combat occurs semi-automatically when enemy units get close enough; casualties, fatigue, ammo, and morale are all tracked by the computer. The game offers beginning wargamers a fast, easy way to experience the battle of Gettysburg.

My favorite feature of both **GMBS** and its precursor is the ability to let the computer replay the original battle, complete with historic notes which pop up at crucial points in the battle. This feature, more than anything else in the game, has given me a clearer understanding of the battle than I've ever had before, and is something I'd like to see other wargame developers emulate in their own designs. For the most part, the multimedia aspects of **GMBS** are just eye and ear

candy, and add little substance to the original game (one exception: Shelby Foote's narration of the battle notes lets you focus on the battlefield without having to stop to refer to text.

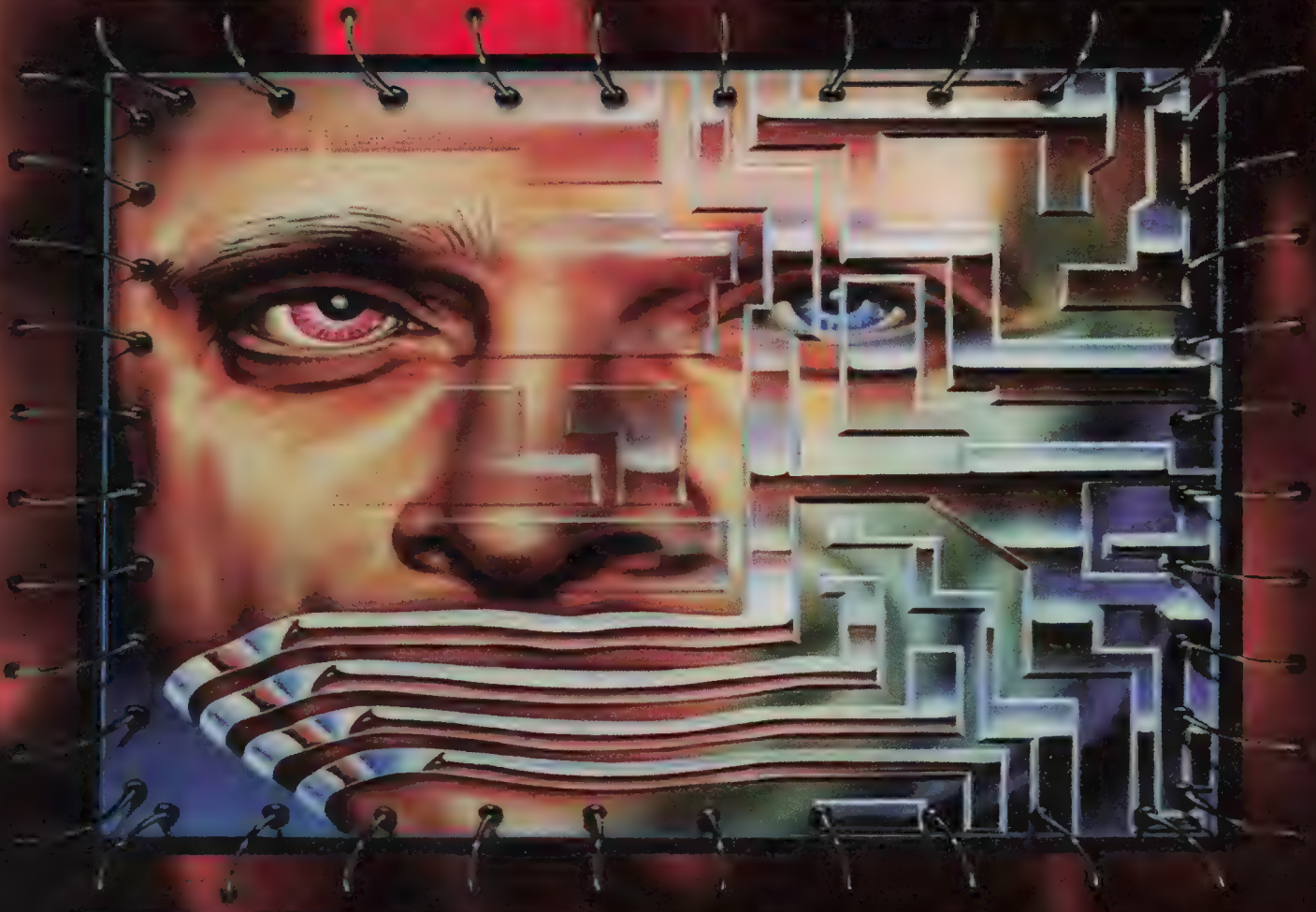
If you're a Gettysburg *grognard* or a strong believer in realism in wargaming, I'd pass on **GMBS**. If you're looking for a light, fast game, or are interested in an educational tool to help you capture the "feel" of Gettysburg, then **GMBS** may be just what the general ordered.

Scott Udell

Designed by: **Swfte**
Published by: **Swfte**
Systems: **Windows CD ROM**

HARLAN ELLISON

I HAVE NO MOUTH. AND I MUST SCREAM



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Summer 1995
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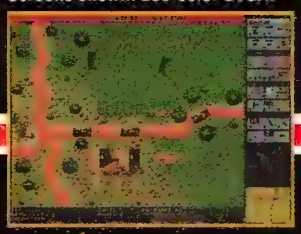

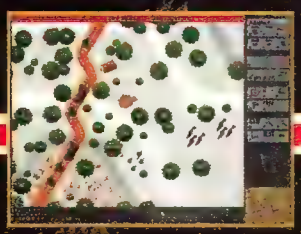

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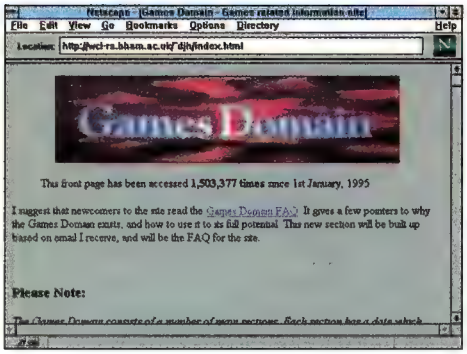
Reader Service No. 141

OVER THE NET

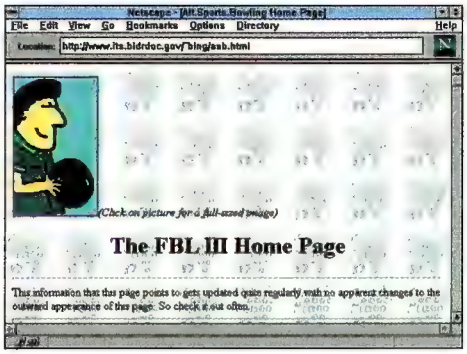
Games Domain ◆ Windows 95 Dial-Up Networking

The Games Domain Revamped

By J. Grant Bell



Games Domain, the uber site of on-line gaming



The Virtual Bowling site. Hurrah!

Time Warner's none-too-remarkable site

The primary site for gaming on the Web has always been the *Games Domain* at http://wcl-rs.bham.ac.uk/~djh/index.html.

This site is comprehensive and constantly-updated, and some recent developments have made it even more worthwhile.

First, the pages have been split into several areas, including a games information section, a direct download area where you can point and click your way to some cool software, an on-line review and gaming magazine, and a section specifically devoted to aspiring game designers.

Another interesting development is the *Domain's* current questionnaire and contest, held in conjunction with *Psygnosis*. The interesting part isn't the contest itself but the fact that commercial developers have started to acknowledge the *Domain;* who knows what future ties to commercial developers could bring? Stay tuned for more information.

Finally, the *Games Domain* has become host to the **Universal Hint System**, an interesting method for getting hints for popular computer games. You can download a **UHS** browser for your system, then download the "module" for the game you're interested in. The **Hint System** feeds you clues to specific problems within the game, starting with oblique hints and finally flat-out telling you what to do. It reminds me of *Infocom's* old invisible-ink clue books, designed to help you through the game without revealing too much.

Virtual Bowling Page

http://www.its.bldrdoc.gov/~bing/asb.html

If you have a penchant for the unusual, check out the *Virtual Bowling Page*. It's your opportunity to get involved in your very own fantasy bowling league! That's right, I knew you'd be interested. Bowling is a dangerous and physically demanding sport that we'd all love to play, but few of us will take the risk. That's why it lends itself perfectly to computer simulation.

Actually, though, you do have to do some real bowling for this league. Apparently members of each team belong to real-life bowling leagues, and they post their scores weekly (sending 'em to their team's "virtual captains"). When the season's over, scores are tallied, prizes are awarded, and a good time is had by all. Virtual bowling, it's the wave of the future. Check it out.

Time Warner Web Page

http://www.pathfinder.com/twi

Time Warner is a media giant that could easily make a big splash in the world of computer gaming. It was with interest, then, that I investigated their Web site. My impression after surveying the premises and leaving, however, was that the company's focus was definitely elsewhere. The site is small and visually unimpressive, and the selection of games is still quite limited.

Highlights included **Rise of the Robots**, a fighting game with great graphics that was universally panned for its lack of playability. **Conqueror: A. D. 1086** looks like a present-day **Defender of the Crown**, though **Defender** was a seminal title back in the days when the industry's brightest graphic chrome was decidedly yawn-inspiring.

It will be interesting to see whether *Time Warner* decides to take bold steps into the world of computer entertainment - they certainly are capable of producing quality games if they put their minds (not to mention their capital) into it. These initial forays, however, seem more like scouting missions than the actual war party. Their Web site reflects this tentative stance: a few pictures, some game descriptions, and not much else.

A Brief List of Game Company Sites

Activision
http://www.activision.com
Atomic Games
http://www.atomic.com
Domark Software
http://www.domark.com
Electronic Arts/Bullfrog/Origin
http://www.ea.com
Interplay Productions
http://www.interplay.com
MicroProse/Spectrum HoloByte
http://www.microprose.com
Westwood Studios
http://www.westwood.com

If you have a web site that you'd like to have included in this section, please send e-mail with your URL to: **splus@together.net**

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Reader Service No. 29

One Click Internet Access in Windows 95

By Steve Bauman

Now that the entire country is being led to believe that they *need* to be on the Internet, lest they be left behind, Windows 95 is on the way to make getting there much easier. The thing that most of the Internet articles fail to warn the users about is just how painfully difficult it can be to actually connect to the World Wide Web or Usenet newsgroups with a modem. You need something called *Winsock*, which is a Windows DLL file that allows your PC to speak TCP/IP, the UNIX/Internet network protocol. By far the most popular one is a program called *Trumpet Winsock*, which comes with a dialer and works quite nicely. Unfortunately it can be a bear to install.

While *Trumpet* works fine under Windows 95, there is a better way to connect, and best of all, it's free! *Microsoft* has included all of the tools necessary to setup a PPP or SLIP connection. The benefits are a slight speed increase and a definite stability increase – the Windows 95 TCP/IP is a full 32-bit implementation that should, in theory, be more robust and stable. It's still a bear to get working, only now it's a bear on a bright and sunny day who's mellowed out after a particularly large meal.

Figure 1

STEP 1

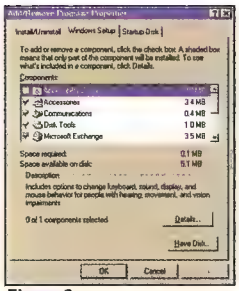


Figure 2

Your first stop is the *Control Panel* (Figure 1), where you will need to make sure you have all of the necessary Windows components installed. You should have your modem installed; if not, you can add one by clicking on the *Modem* icon. Assuming that's kosher, click on the *Add/Remove Programs* icon (*Figure 2*).

Go down to the *Communications* option and click on the *Details* button. There you will find *Dial-Up Networking*, which – if it isn't already installed – should be selected now by clicking on the check box (*Figure 3*). Once *Dial-Up Networking* is installed you'll have a new icon in your *My Computer* folder called, appropriately enough *Dial-Up Networking*, but don't worry about that yet. We need to set up the networking.

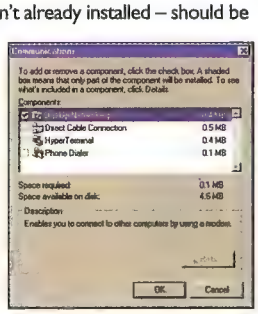


Figure 3

STEP 2

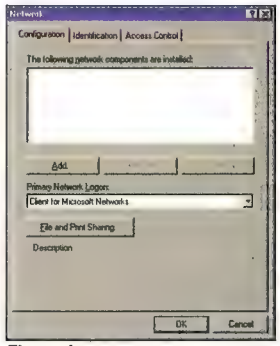


Figure 4

Open up the *Control Panel* again and select the *Network* icon. Welcome to the world of setting up a network under Windows 95 (*Figure 4*). The first thing you need to do is *Add* an adapter. Click the add button and select *Adapter*. In *Manufacturers* find *Microsoft* and select *Dial-Up Adapter*.

Now that you have an adapter, you need network protocols. Unless you plan on connecting to *Novell* servers you can get rid of IPX and/or Net Beui. Click on *Add* again and now select *Protocol*. Once again go to *Microsoft* and select *TCP/IP*. Your final *Network* menu should look something like Figure 5.

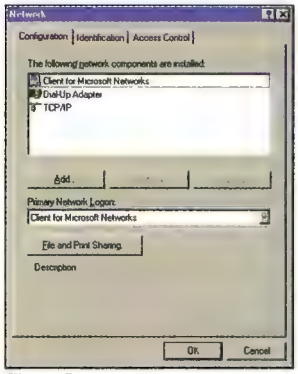


Figure 5

Clicking on *TCP/IP* and then selecting *Properties* you will come face to face with what makes the Internet setup evil – all of the weird numbers you have to enter (*Figure 6*). It's also the step that's most difficult to actually guide someone through. In here you will find such things as *IP Address*, *Domain Name Server*, *Default Gateway*, and other Internet oddities. Your service provider should provide you with all of these numbers – every setup is completely different with regard to most of these settings, therefore it's nearly impossible to address them here. Enter in the numbers and you'll be told to re-boot the system. Do it.

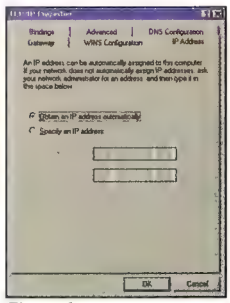


Figure 6

STEP 3

After re-booting your machine, select the *My Computer* desktop icon and double click on *Dial-Up Networking* (Figure 7). One there, select *Make New Connection* and you'll be faced with Figure 8. You can enter whatever name you'd like for the connection.

Figure 7

On some systems you may need to have a custom login. On my particular system, I have to choose SLIP or PPP, so I can't use the default login, which just sends the login name and password. If you have this problem, click on the *Properties* box next to your modem and go to *Options*. Check off *Bring up terminal window after dialing* and you can manually login (Figure 9)

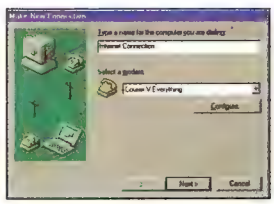


Figure 8

Now comes the easy part. Click on *Next* and fill in the phone numbers and such. When you're finally done, click *Finish* and an icon will appear that is your one-click Internet connection. Upon first selecting it you can enter your name and password, which is only relevant if you don't have to manually login as described earlier. Just select *Connect* and off you go (Figure 10).

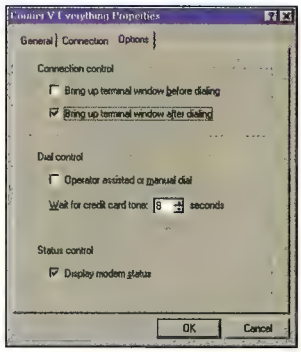


Figure 9

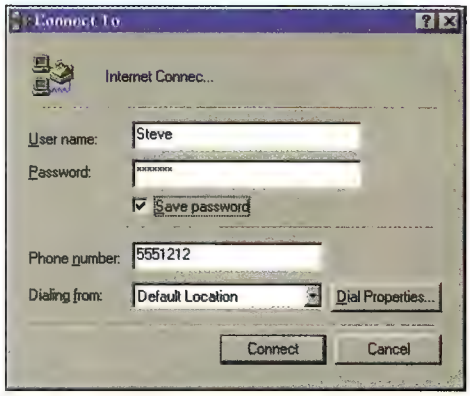
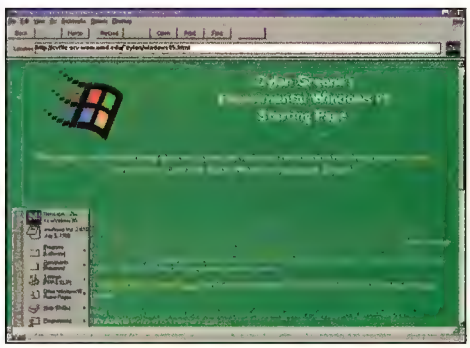


Figure 10

Your first stop if you actually get this working? Why **Yahoo** of course (**http://www. yahoo. com**). From there, you can go *Computers – Operating Systems – Windows 95* and find all sorts of goodies, including the version of **Netscape** that runs natively in Windows 95. Good luck (you'll need it...).



http://cville-srv.wam.umd.edu/~dylan/window95.html

A Few Windows 95 Sites

Microsoft
http://www.microsoft.com
Dial Up Networking Explained (recommended)
http://www.castle.net/~ace/cwin95.html
Windows Inquirer
http://www.haywire.com/inquirer
Windows 95 Games
http://www.shore.net/~mpcd

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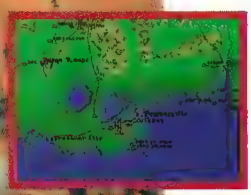
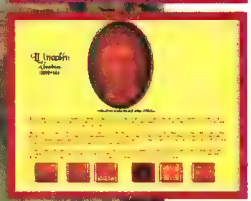
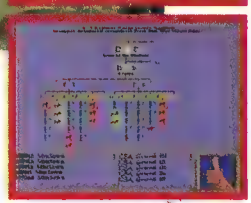
The Civil War



BUILD-
RECRUIT ARMIES, BUILD FLEETS, SET UP BLOCKADES, IMPROVE RAILWAYS AND CONSTRUCT FORTIFICATIONS.

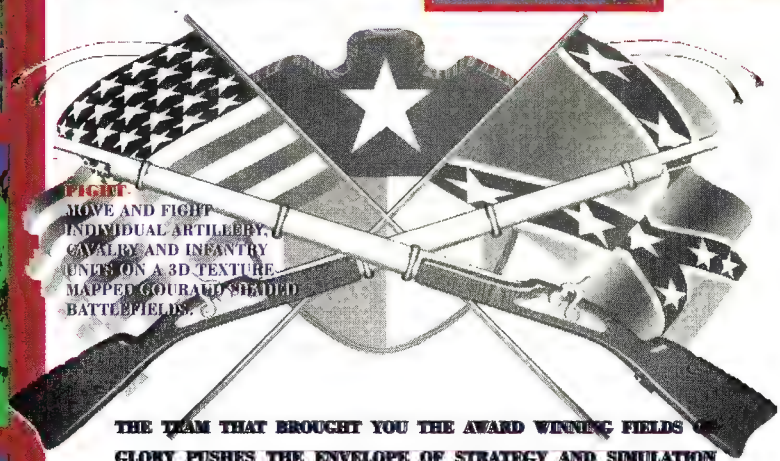


DATABASE-
ACCESS TO ALL THE INFORMATION YOU WILL EVER NEED. GENERALS, WEAPONS AND WHAT REALLY HAPPENED.



COMMAND-
APPOINT, PROMOTE AND SACK HISTORICAL GENERALS. DECIDE ARMY STRENGTHS AND FORMATIONS. PUT YOUR STRATEGY INTO ACTION.

MANEUVER-
USE THE DETAILED CAMPAIGN MAP OF THE USA TO MOVE YOUR ARMIES BY LAND, SEA, RAIL AND RIVER.



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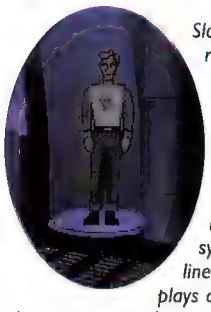
Reader Service No. 46

Space Quest 6 The Spinal Frontier

Venerable space janitor and savior of the known world Roger Wilco and our reviewer space out together...

Roger embedded in the street, the game's first puzzle



Slosho Benjo is our guest reviewer. Slosho previously wrote reviews for the on-line service CompuBucks and has also submitted reviews to Popular Janitronics (always rejected). He is a prolific reviewer with a unique system for meeting deadlines. He arbitrarily selects, plays and reviews a couple of the many games he is assigned and makes up the rest. We're not sure if he ever played ***Space Quest 6*** *and this review is just one he made up, but we suspect he didn't and it may be.*

Why a million units of the **Space Quest** series has been sold beats me. What do all those gamers find entertaining about a moronic janitor with a plunger?! Yes, he was promoted to Captain – briefly, but now, he's back for the *sixth* time, and he's been demoted to janitor again! And he's not even a good one!

Roger's adventure begins on Polysorbate LX (sixty), a hot vacation spot for the rich and sanitary, but soon he's shrunk down to microscopic proportions and injected into the bloodstream of Corpsman Stellar Santiago, a crew member of Roger's newest vessel, the SCS Deepship 86.

Gamers are asked to travel via her bloodstream through her stomach, pancreas, gall bladder and other vital organs to her brain where the foozle, Sarpei, is trying to kill her by invading her cerebral cortex.

Does that sound pleasurable? Even in simulation? Oh, sure! Like you don't have anything better to do.

These (shudder) "one hundred" interiors are even rendered in (ugh) "scintillating SVGA 3D graphics." **SQ6** also features "full multimedia voice, sound and musical effects." So what? Do we really need to *hear* as well as see a gall bladder? Gary Owens is back (he narrated **SQ4**) to narrate. Whoopee. As if anyone remembers *Laugh In*.

Gamers say they like the series for its humor. Frankly, I don't get it. What's funny about an idiotic janitor? I never laughed during the movie **Forrest Gump**, either!

There are also supposed to be dozens of hilarious spoofs on famous science fiction movies, computer games and video games in **SQ6**, too. Well, where are they? I didn't see any. There's an arcade sequence called **Stooge Fighter 3**, but it didn't ring any bells. One of the shops was selling copies of a game called **Duum**, but again, I don't see anything funny about calling a game "dumb." Who'd want to play a game called **Dumb**? Who'd want to go to a movie called **Dumb**? And no, I didn't go see **Dumbo**, or **Dumb and Dumber**. Boy, would that have been dumb.

It's a good thing *Sierra* included an opening walkthrough brochure called *Having Trouble Getting Started?* I couldn't solve the first puzzle! When Roger is beamed down to Polysorbate LX, it looks like his lower half didn't make it, and was dispersed elsewhere. I had no idea of what to do. I may have if I had known that his lower half was just embedded in a hole in the street.

These puzzles are too hard to solve.

The walkthrough brochure was very helpful and a good thing. It also includes information about other documentation I wouldn't have found: inside the CD jewel case. It was there I found there was a DOS version of the game on disk as well as a Windows version. The *Windows* version couldn't put a **SQ6** icon in the windows group for some unknown reason, so I installed the DOS. It worked just fine.

The Dew Beam Inn is mentioned in Popular Janitronics

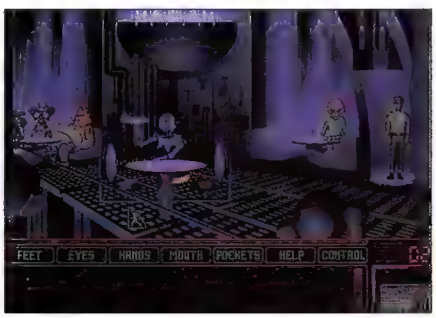
Sierra also provides a copy of **Popular Janitronics**. This isn't really of much interest since it has little to do with the game (oh, they say it includes hints for puzzles in the game, but for the life of me, I couldn't figure out what they were). It's mostly about janitorial things, like repairing commodes. Not my cup of tea at all.

Save your money. Don't buy this game unless you like hilarious stories about lame space janitors touring (in vivid color and with stereophonic sound) interior body organs.

We have just been informed that Slosho Benjo is an alias for one of the game's writers, and that this review is a hoax and should be regarded as such. Unfortunately, we don't have another review to take its place, but Geoff M. Keighley (a regular Strategy Plus *contributor) assures us that "The Spinal Frontier is the best* **Space Quest**, *yet!* Sierra *returns to their roots with this marvelous adventure, and we're not talking trees."*

Andy Backer

Inside the Arcade is Stooge Fighter 3



The hoses on the hookah may prove useful

Designed by: **Scott Murphy & Josh Mandel**
Published by: **Sierra**
Platforms: **Windows, DOS**

Witchaven

Dare to enter. The spell is cast this Halloween!

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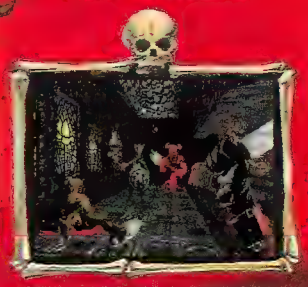

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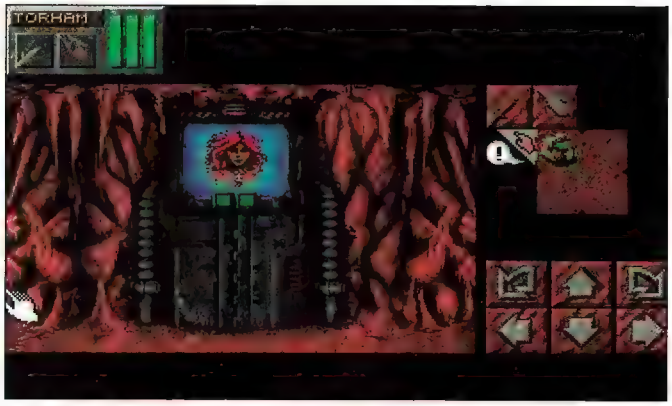
BOOTS OF RE

Ol'Unca Andy's mythical Inn and spell of last resort for solving adventure puzzles. If all else fails, just re-boot! Heh-heh...



Begin DMII with Torham to take party members out of deep freeze

This column got its name years ago. I was messaging various gamers in the Gamers Forum on *CompuServe* about **Pool of Radiance**. I asked about which spell I should use to solve a particular combat problem (probably in the first battle with the Trolls). Someone suggested a spell and then added the comment, "Of course, if that spell doesn't work you can always try Boots of Re."

I wrote back, "Where can I find these boots? What level do my characters have to be to use them?" Then I got a reply very carefully spelling out that the game didn't have any boots – that Boots of Re was just another way of saying re-boot. Was my face red! I vowed then that if I ever wrote a column, **Boots of Re** was what I would call it – and so I have. Heh-heh..."

Battered but not Bewildered

Battered has become so bored with the dearth of role-playing games he is now moonlighting as a private eye and writing a novel about his experiences. He has tentatively titled it **Battered but not Bewildered.** This is his opening paragraph:

They call me Battered, because I am. I'm big. I'm mean. I'm ugly. I live alone, for no woman can look at me. I work alone, for I can look at no man. Kiss me or kill me, I'll always be lonely.

The kid's no Dashiell Hammett but he's certainly hard-boiled, don't you think?

Shamus or shame me

I have a theory. Hard-boiled mystery fans mostly enjoy the role-playing (ugh, that misnomer again) genre of computer games, whereas regular mystery fans like the puzzle-adventures best.

Heroes of hard-boiled detective stories solve cases with brute force. They do not use brain-power, they just pound their heads against brick walls until they (the bricks) crumble. They persevere. That pretty much sums up the way a gamer plays a hard-core CRPG, too. A gamer perseveres. S/he doesn't have to be particularly clever, just persistent.

Mystery novels and puzzle-adventure games are very similar in structure: facts are gathered until a deduction can be made. Brain power not brawn is the key.

Beyond Entombed's morning room

Dungeon Master II booted

Ye olde (and growing older) Editor read in my last column that I didn't know much about **Dungeon Master II** so he sent a preview copy to alleviate my appalling ignorance. I thanked him, but now look forward to playing the final version. It still looks like the old **Dungeon Master**, but it's been cleverly improved (adding outdoor scenes and manipulable furniture in the dungeons, etc.) and it definitely is not **Chaos Strikes Back**. The sound effects had not yet been integrated into this preview version, so I only played long enough to get a taste. That taste made me ravenous for the final version.

What's hot, what's not

The most popular adventure for July was *Spectrum HoloByte's* **Star Trek: The Next Generation**. It's heavy on graphics and speech, but doesn't take long for the experienced gamer to solve. Still, **ST:TNG** is worth the money and takes much longer to play than *LucasArts'* also popular **Full Throttle**. *Sierra's* **Space Quest 6** was released, as was *Sanctuary Woods'* **Buried in Time** (**Journeyman Project II**). Neither one is as popular as **ST:TNG** or **FT**, yet, but are getting favorable comments.

Alas and alack! No new CRPGs were released. **Ravenloft II (Stone Prophet)** heads the popularity list for older CRPGs still being played.

Shareware of interest: Mordor

Mordor is a new shareware CRPG for *Windows™*. I have only been playing a late beta, not the final version, but am already very impressed. This is a game poor in graphics but rich in gaming environment – one of those games that keeps you up through the wee hours (*whee!*) creating characters, taking them on dungeon crawls, finding treasure, killing monsters, gaining experience and building up stats.

The game is in many ways a throwback to the original **Wizardry**, but you can play it in *Windows* and there are more graphics, including a large, postage-stamp sized dungeon that you travel through via first person perspective. There are also graphic stills of monsters you meet, but no animations. Each option opens up its own little window with buttons you can click on to give various commands. There is an option to go dungeon crawling,

one to go shopping, there are guilds to visit (and some sell spells), a jail to pick up companions and a morgue from which to retrieve and revive the dead.

Like I said, if you're familiar with the original **Wizardry** you're familiar with many parts of **Mordor**. There's just so much *more* to **Mordor**, and a gamer can spend not just fifty or so hours playing the game, but hundreds. Characters can attain up to 999 levels of experience!

This isn't a game for everybody, however. Only the dedicated role-player will want to play here. There's way too few graphics (and way too many windows with too much text) for **DOOM**-type game lovers. Playing the game often feels like you're checking out menu options in a complicated database. Still, the patient gamer will find more pleasure here than in most of the commercial role-playing games released this past year. Call 800/624-2101 to order.

Shareware of interest: Entombed

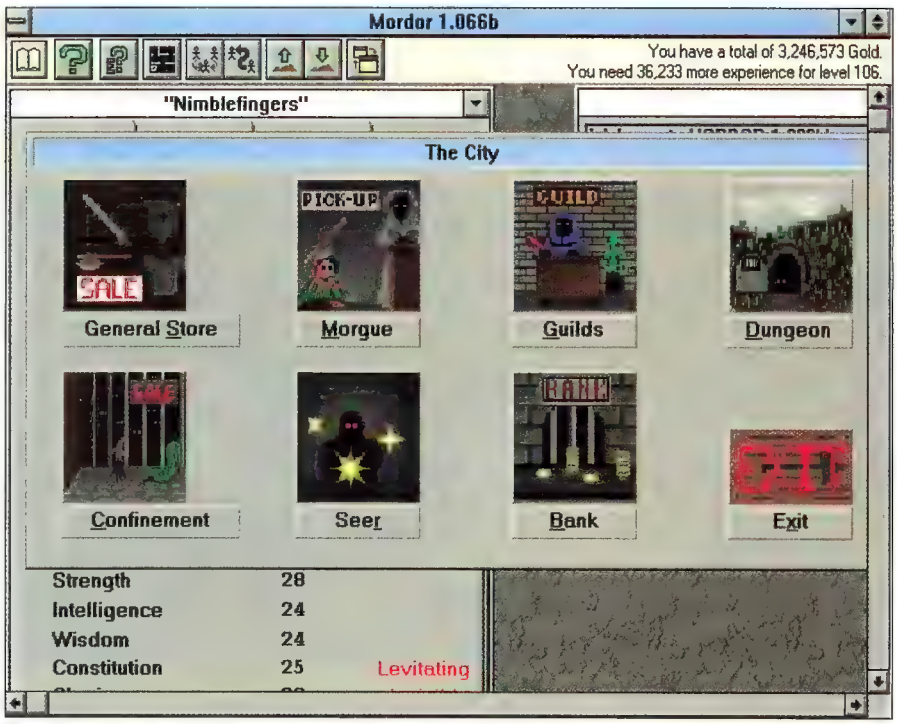
Entombed is another shareware game designed to be played in *Windows*. I've played the final CD release version and was favorably impressed with this puzzle-adventure (stress *puzzle*), which reminded me more of **Jewels of the Oracle** than **Myst** (to which just about every new adventure game release is wrongly compared). **Myst** is a complicated, innovative story with well-integrated puzzles. A large area is available for exploration, thanks to the clever use of time travel.

Games like **Entombed** and **JotO** have smaller areas to explore. The puzzles are not as well integrated into the story and are much more similiar to the puzzles in **7th Guest**.

To get to the next room various puzzles and traps have to be solved, some involving object manipulation. It's much like exploring the interior of an ancient Egyptian pyramid. Make a mistake solving a trap and you die a horrible death. Journal notes help the gamer along the way, but there's precious little story line and character development.

Myst and **7th Guest** are both superior, with a scrolling glide from area to area in the latter. **Myst** has a stop and start slide-show look, but even *that* is superior to **Entombed's** click-on-a-screen-hotspot to jump – not scroll – to another location.

Still, the puzzles are challenging and the hi-res ray-traced graphics atmospheric. It's much better than the usual shareware adventure games I've seen, and has a very polished and professional commercial sheen. Besides, it's fun to play!



Places to go, things to do in Mordor

From beyond the pale (rhymes with mail)

This column has been getting E-mail regularly, as you know, but this month Unca has also received fan letters via US Snail. Thank you Les Parnell and C. Regan for the words of praise and for including stamped and self addressed return envelopes! Keep those cards and letters coming, folks. It's always a thrill to get your pleas for help and hear that these meanderings are being well-received.

Just remember that my ability to answer your questions and send you walkthroughs is limited to the adventure and role-playing games I've played. I play many, but not all. There are times I have to write back and say, "Sorry." I'm only part ASCII, you know, the rest is all too human.

Peeve of the month

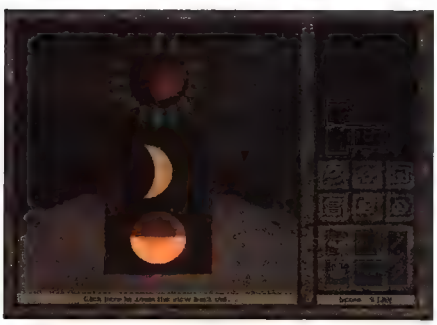
Once again, it's time to vent a little steam. This time the hot air isn't so much mine as it is that of ex-*Sierra* insiders. There have been message threads on *CompuServe* about *Sierra* management decisions undermining *Sierra*. To be fair, there are two sides to every story, but I suspect that *Sierra* (as it's being reported) has been growing too large and too fast. Most of you know that they mistakenly gave up the rights to a sequel for **Betrayal at Krondor** in favor of what they thought would be a bigger blockbuster: the bug-plagued release of **Outpost**. And of course **BaK** continues to grow in sales and is now considered one of the all-time greats in the role-playing genre. Wonder who made the decision not to renew R. E. Feist's (the writer) contract? Was *that* ever a big mistake!

Anyway, the rumor is that *Sierra*, which once was nurturing and protecting its staff of brilliant writers, has driven a number of them to look elsewhere for employment. How much truth there is in the rumor I don't know, but it certainly is worth space for this month's pet peeve.

La revedere (a Rumanian farewell)

I'll be back next month with more scintillating, sage suggestions. In the meantime, request assistance in solving adventure puzzles from Unca at *Strategy Plus* or 71202,3451@ compuserve.com.

Andy Backer


Lighting up Entombed rooms involves these symbols

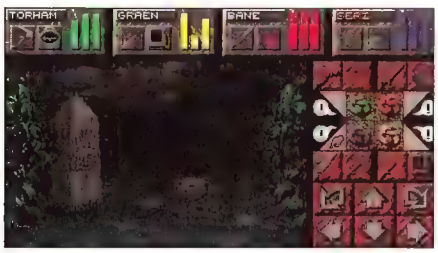
The moons need to be changed to suns in this Entombed puzzle

Select the order of objects the symbol is constructed of to disarm an Entombed trap

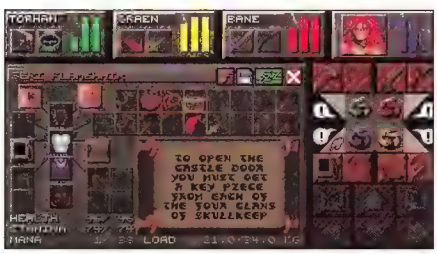
Dungeon Master: The Legend of Skullkeep

Use the key from the food shop here to get out of this area

The illustration depicts what's for sale: cost at top, buy price below



An edible worm round: what's left after killing a claw creature



Put scrolls in the right hand to read them

Designed by: **FTL and Interplay**
Published by: **Interplay**
Systems: **DOS**

"We need more light, Unca!"
"Okay, okay, another torch spell coming up."
"That the best you can do?"
"I've never had to spell and slog through a storm, before, Abma."
"Yow!"
"Heh, heh. The lightning get you?"
"Watch out, Bash!"
"Oh, it's just another Glop, Bat, bop him one time for me."
"But, what's that burrowing towards us?"
"Oh, no! Not another one of those clawed creatures!"
"He's circling around to the left!"
"Yow! He bit me in the rear!"
"Turn around!"
"Where'd he go?"
"To the right!"
"Left!"
"No... he's gone."
"Anyone kill anything?"
"Nada."

Intelligent monsters that circle, retreat, and even run away are one of the fun new features of **The Legend of Skullkeep** (**TLOS**), the second **Dungeon Master** role-playing adventure from *FTL* (aided by *Interplay* this time). Other features not found in **DM** include storm weather; shops selling and buying armor, weapons, food and clothing; magic maps; a variety of new settings – above and below ground, not just the same old gray walls; and manipulable furnishings like tables and paintings.

There are also several improvements to the interface. If an object like a weapon, map, trunk, sack or money-box is held in a hand, a gray icon of the object appears in the action/command window to the right. Click on the gray icon (not the full color object in the character's hand windows) to operate or open it . Objects like food, coins and potions can be picked up in the main window easily and moved into the appropriate receptacle this way.

The magic system's interface has been improved as well. Click on the exclamation mark to bring up the magic menu. The symbols now have icons above them, illustrating the function of the symbol. *FUL* has a fire icon; *VI*, water.

Ful and *VI*, for those of you who haven't played **DM**, are the names of magic symbols found in the documentation on magic. To cast a torch spell, click on a power icon, then on the fire symbol (*FUL*). Then click on the panel with the two inscribed symbols. To make a healing potion, put an empty flask in a priest/priestess' left hand, select his/her exclamation mark, click a power icon and then select the water (*VI*) icon. Click on the inscription panel and the flask should fill with healing potion, depending on the experience of your priest/priestess. The power icons indicate how much Mana is to be given to the spell. Inexperienced or low Mana characters can not access the higher power icons.

Examine found objects and potions in order to discover the symbols for spells. Click the object on the eyeball in the inventory to examine it.

Story is a weakness in the **Dungeon Master** series, less so in **TLOS** than **DM**, but still a problem. The exposition is in the documentation, not discovered by playing the game. Movies (and the better adventure games) have exposition, but the audience isn't handed a prologue to read before the movie begins.

Your name is Torham Zed (character names can be changed, unlike in **DM**). Evil creatures have taken over Skullkeep and are threatening to take over the whole world. Your challenge is to find the four key pieces to open Skullkeep, destroy the creatures and control the Zol Link (a machine connecting to evil worlds).

The barracks (an underground cavern near Skullkeep) has a variety of characters from whom you pick three to accompany you as your companions. I chose Seri Flamehair, Bane Blade Cleaver and Graen Ozbor.

The documentation includes a walkthrough for the opening puzzles of the game: how to take your party up a ladder, gather a few objects, locate the resurrection alcove for your dead, find the key to the outside and buy and sell in the shops.

The key that opens the next outside door is on a table in the food shop. There you'll find Skullkeep. After that, it's a matter of practicing spells and skills, getting the four key pieces, and finally entering Skullkeep.

A recommended strategy is to find and kill the bats hiding in caves near Skullkeep and trade them in the Food Shop for coins. Use the coins to shop for water bags (botas) weapons, and armor. Kill the claw creatures for worm rounds (edible).

Even if there weren't a dearth of role-playing adventures I'd highly recommend **TLOS**. It's an atmospheric blend of superior graphics and sound, animations, real-time combat and clever puzzles. **Dungeon Master** fans will be delighted. Much of the interface is familiar but the game itself is filled with new marvels. It will be a strong contender for role-playing game of the year. ◆

Andy Backer

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Reader Service No. 25

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Thunderscape

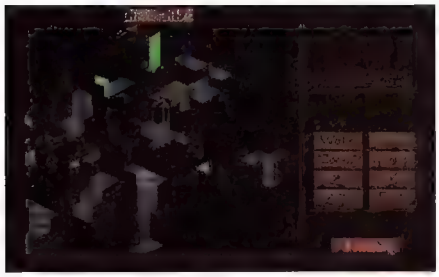
Further proof that it's better to be good than on the cutting edge

Aden was at peace. A "Golden Age" was dawning, fueled by a new technology called "mechamagic" that merged steam and magic. In one event, the sun was eclipsed and thousands of creatures known as nocturnals came to life. The Darkfall, as it came to be referred to, spread across the land, engulfing the World of Aden. Now the nocturnals have captured the magical shield at Skellon's Pass, which is allowing them to penetrate the Northlands. A brave party of adventurers need to retake the Skellon's Pass and reactivate the shield.

This plot would probably make an apt metaphor for the current state of the role-playing genre. Once, the genre was at peace, as nearly every new release featured a new adventure in a fantastic land – games with legions of monsters, rooms full of treasure, and loads of devious puzzles. Unfortunately the plague which descended upon the genre was probably **DOOM**, which has supplanted the slower paced and more cerebral CRPG for many gamers.

Undaunted, *SSI*, one of the leaders in the genre with their *AD&D* titles, have forged ahead with a new role-playing universe, called Aden. The first game set in the World of Aden, and the hero who will hopefully lead the genre out of the darkness, is **Thunderscape**, a first-person CRPG that at first glance looks like a **DOOM** clone but turns out to be much more. It shares many of the traits that *every* game seems to have; the smooth scrolling 3D engine, the rich storyline, cinematics, digital sound, CD-audio, animated monsters, etc. But it's not a clone.

This is the turn-based combat menu - note that you can use a quick-key to re-use the same attack



This is the automap and yes, it's as useless as it looks. This is one aspect of the design that needs a serious *redesign*...

Roaming the World of Aden - my those mountains are looking mighty vertical...

In what is perhaps the one design decision that goes against current trends, and something sure to be the aspect of the game which will appeal the most to long-time CRPGers, is the inclusion of a turn-based combat system. If you see a foe in the distance you can assail it with missile weapons or spells (or vice versa) in real-time, but when they reach a certain distance from the player the game switches to a turn-based combat system. Once in that, you can choose to attack, defend, cast spells or switch weapons (among other things); each of these options usually has a sub-option which gets more specific.

The play balance of the game seems to be well thought out. My personal preference is for the less combat-oriented and more story-based CRPG, which means I'm more partial to an **Ultima VII** than one of the old *SSI* Gold Box games. A 3D game will avoid the "you're being attacked by 67 dung beetles" flaw that many CRPGs fell into – what, were they all standing on top of one another?

Thunderscape shares one flaw, if you can call it that, with *SSI*'s previous "next generation" role-playing engine, found in **Dark Sun** (the final engine which powered the last two *AD&D* licenses). It's as if the games were in development just long enough for the graphics technology used to be a generation *behind* what is currently being produced. Whereas **Dark Sun**'s engine closely resembled **Ultima VII**'s, **Thunderscape**'s 3D implementation is more **DOOM** than **System Shock**. This isn't to imply that it doesn't offer a few of the newer 3D features such as looking up and down, but graphically the game is only playable in low-resolution VGA (which causes the text font to be particularly ugly) and the textures on the walls are fairly uninteresting. None of these criticisms hamper gameplay, but they don't enhance it either.

The character generation - there's nothing here you haven't seen before

It would seem that **Thunderscape** will be manna from heaven for the game-starved CRPG fan, but due to its lack of gloss it could lack crossover appeal. Which is unfortunate, because it is an excellent entry level role-playing game, one which *should* appeal to a large audience, one that's needed to sustain the CRPG genre. **Thunderscape** shares a characteristic of many of *SSI*'s titles – they never seem to be jaw-droppingly brilliant in their first five minutes of play because they don't scream "look at me, I'm seriously cool," but instead draw you in slowly, and in the end usually provide a more satisfying gaming experience. Which is all that matters in the end, right?

Steve Bauman

Designed and Published by: **SSI**
Platforms: **DOS, Windows 95 launchable**

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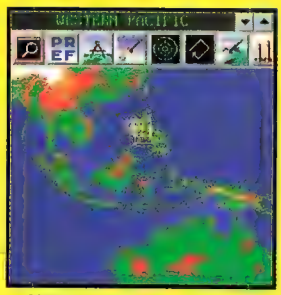

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INTRACORP

Reader Service No. 25

Buried in Time

Is this the best adventure game of the year? So far so good...

One of the Mayan puzzles – note the amazing detail on the images
You can see here how they've managed to integrate video into the rendered backgrounds seamlessly

The greenhouse room in your apartment allows you to use your environment simulation – here's a particularly scenic one

Try not to interact with humans in the past lest you actually affect history and end up guilty of what you're trying to prove you're innocent of!

Designed by: **Presto Studios**
Published by: **Sanctuary Woods**
Platforms: **Windows, Macintosh**

When *Presto Studios*' **The Journeyman Project** was released for the Macintosh it created quite a stir. It was called the first "photo-realistic adventure" and proceeded to be one of the most highly regarded games ever released for the Mac, predating **Myst**. Unfortunately, the PC conversion was a mess. It was later rectified by the **Turbo** version, but many PC gamers were soured by the original version and never played, much less completed, the original. It was a good game in its own right, but even experience with the first game won't prepare you for the growth shown in its sequel **Buried in Time**: **The Journeyman Project 2**, which is being released by those up and comers at *Sanctuary Woods*.

The sequel takes place a few years after the first game. You are still Agent 5 of the Temporal Security Agency, whose job is to protect the integrity of time itself, as time travel has become a reality. You awaken one morning in 2319 and are confronted by your future self, who informs you that in the year 2328 you have been falsely accused of altering history. You will have to prove your innocence, by visiting the periods of history you are charged with altering and by searching for clues about the identity of someone who's trying to frame you.

In your travels you will find yourself in all sorts of visually interesting locations, including your future home, King Richard the Lionhearted's castle, some **Myst**-erious catacombs in Mayan Mexico, Leonardo DaVinci's laboratory and a meteor-damaged space station. During the course of your adventure you will find various items to assist you in your searches, including upgrades to the bio-suit used in your travels through time. Some of the chips you'll find will translate all languages for you and – best of all – you'll eventually find an AI chip named Arthur, who not only makes fun of you when you do stupid things but also offers hints and advice for solving some of the problems you will face.

The game has multiple modes of play. A walk-through mode allows players to just wander around the lush landscapes, allowing them to experience all of the visuals without having to deal with the adventuring parts of the game. Real gamers, however, will play it in adventure mode and be faced with some clever and always logical puzzles. The game claims that it has over 50 hours of gameplay, and even though we weren't counting the hours played, it seems like a valid claim.

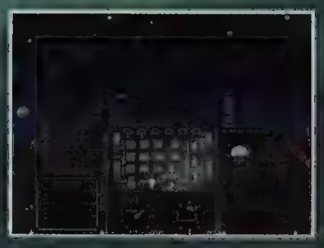
Like all Windows-based adventures, **Buried in Time** moves at a rather leisurely pace. There are brief pauses every time you move as the rendered movement from location to location pulls off the CD-ROM. The wait is usually worth it. The transitions from movement to still screens is seamless; in most games, the still image suddenly takes on the grainy compression characteristics of the video. You don't get that here, especially if your machine is fast enough to handle the game in its recommended 16-bit color (65,000 colors – most modern video cards are nearly as fast in this mode as they are in 256 colors). The game works fine in all versions of Windows, but really cooks on a Pentium running Windows 95 with 16 megabytes of RAM (it works fine with 8 megs, too).

Graphically speaking, **Buried in Time** stands in a league of its own. It is by far the best- looking adventure this reviewer has ever seen, with rendered graphics which don't look like rendered graphics (the ultimate compliment). The videos of the various humans you will come across are well integrated into the backgrounds. Though overall I'm still somewhat partial to the classic graphic adventure third-person look used in – for example – the *LucasArts* adventures, this game uses a first-person view and sticks with it, unlike other games which for no apparent reason switch between first and third person views.

The multimedia adventure genre has received a much-needed boost with **Buried in Time**. Unlike all too many designs these days, it never errs on the side of presentation over content. It's the adventure game that **Myst** is purported to be but actually falls short of, with a rich, detailed and well-researched story, graphics to die for, a clean interface and most of all, gameplay that never gets tedious or repetitive. Is it the best adventure released so far this year? You bet.

Steve Bauman

THE ULTIMATE BATTLE



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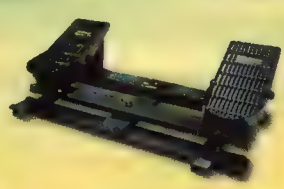

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Full Throttle

The second part of our walkthrough finds Ben heading off to Corley Motors

The Polecats were in jail. Ripburger wanted to turn Corley Motors into a mini-van factory. I still hadn't showered. Big stink. I was still wanted for murder. Big problem. After jumping the gorge, I was off to Corley Motors to find Ripburger.

Corley Motors. Heaven. I'd always wanted to make the pilgrimage to the holy land, but never had. Until now. I wished the circumstances could be better. I wished Corley was still alive. I wished the Polecats were out of jail. I wished I could be riding on the open road, rather than for my life. Damn! there it was. Corley Motors. There seemed to be something going on at the track next door.

Turns out Old Man Corley built a demolition derby track for his employees. Since I couldn't get in the building where Ripburger was supposed to speak to the shareholders the next day, I checked out the show. I talked to this guy named Horrace; looks like he's fallen off his bike a few too many times. When he turned around to check out the T-shirts for me, I stole the cute little bunny. Wait, don't print that I said, "cute little bunny." Damn.

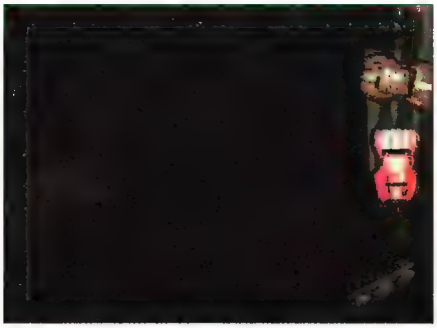
I'd sorta figured out that Mo was a Vulture, so I was off to their lair. They had a minefield blocking their entrance, so I sacrificed my bunny in the field. All that was left was a battery. That might come in handy, so I grabbed it. But I needed more bunnies. One wouldn't do. I decided to go back to Horrace.

He was still there, still belching, still chattering away. I needed to distract him so I could grab the "box o' bunnies" he had on the counter behind him. He let me try out his radio-controlled car. Big mistake. It crapped out, but I had a battery. I drove it into the smashitorium and off he went to find it. I took the bunnies. I was content.

I used the box o' bunnies on the minefield, but I didn't want the bunnies to run off in every direction. No, I wanted a *controlled* bunny assault. So I picked 'em up and placed 'em one at a time in the minefield. After they blew (and I'd wiped away a tear for another bunny givin' its life for Corley Motors) I followed 'em until I got to the Vulture's lair.

Sure enough, Mo was there. Only, she thought I'd killed her dad. I tried getting mad at her, but that didn't help. She was ripping me apart. But I knew how to get to her. Malcolm had earlier told me his nickname for her, and a well-placed insult using that name might prove I wasn't the guy who did it. It worked. That young go-getter Mo was like putty in my arms...

The first thing I needed to do was bounce off the top of the brown car in order to stall it. I just moved to this ramp, and that moron was just sittin' there, waitin' for me



I pushed the brown car over to the second ramp and off it, allowing me to land first on it then on Ripburger's Goons' car

Bumper Cars

The Vultures had a plan. It wasn't a good one, but would have to do. I needed to blow up Mo in the demolition derby and then catch fire. I'd been on fire before – it wasn't that bad, actually. I had one of the Vultures take pictures so I could show how I did it.

Now I was on fire and needed to get the hell outta there. I ran over to the stadium exit to see if it was locked, and started a fire in the whole stadium. That was fine – it opened the exit – but the Goons were finally able to fire up their car, and chased me. I needed to shake 'em. Since I was already on fire, I hopped on top of their car and waited until they got near Mo's ex-car, which was also on fire. I hopped in the fire and those moronic Goons followed me in. Big mistake. Big boom.

Corley Motors

I found myself back at the lair and Mo was sitting in front of a pile of parts. It seems she was looking for a key to Malcolm's safe. I'd say the key was right in front of her, but I don't talk much. I looked at the parts and thought it was odd they all had numbers on them. I noted the numbers and Mo told me there was a secret entrance to Malcolm's office in the back of the Corley Motors building.

She said I needed to kick a certain area of a wall when the utilities stopped. I randomly kicked around (the crack was supposed to be at eye level, but Mo was a child when I last saw him enter here, so I guessed right – it was a lower crack). When the ticking stopped, I kicked. And kicked. And kicked again until one spot made a funny noise. The door opened. No problem.

Heavy metal thunder indeed — Ben rides the flames of freedom...

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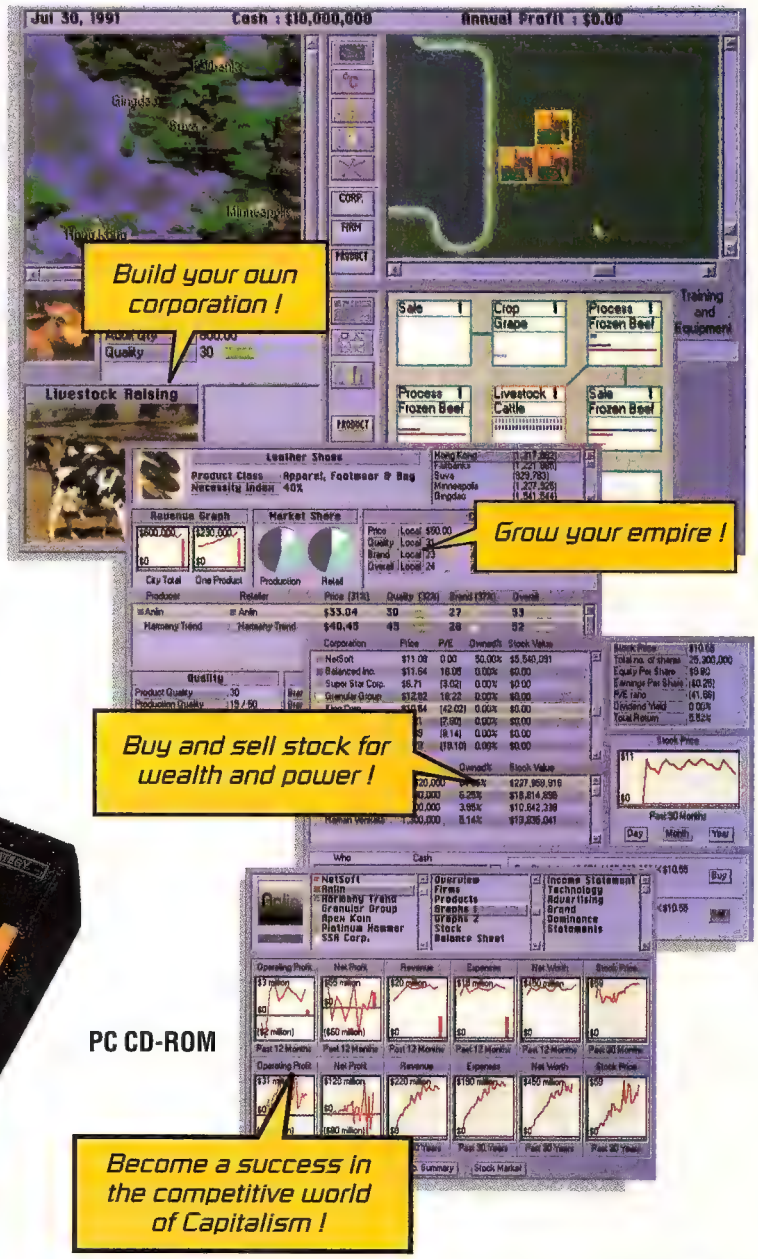
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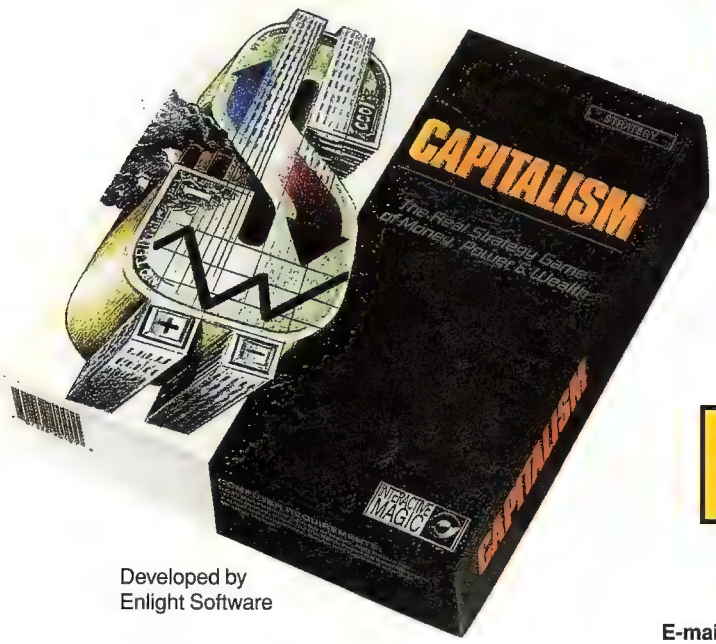

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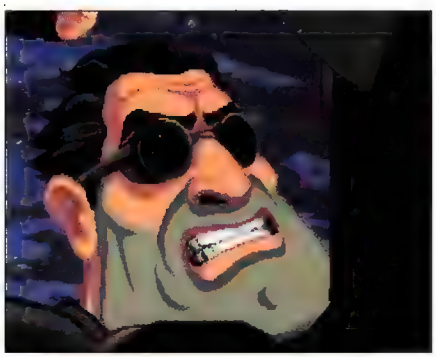
More of Ben's Travel Log



Me again - I hate having my picture taken

Mo looking as, uh, OK as ever

Ripburger - still business scum

Hired Goons

The safe was in the middle of the room. I used the key from the parts and opened it. Inside was a tape and an access card. I had the pictures of Ripburger offing Corley and a tape. I needed to show them to the stockholders, who were sitting there listening to Ripburger telling them that Corley wanted to build mini-vans. Anyone who knew Malcolm would know this was crap, but the shareholders lapped it up.

In the next room I found the camera and overhead projector controls in two different rooms. I used the access card to get into the film room, then stopped the projector and cranked up the lamp to its highest setting. This melted the film. When the, erm, person checked the film, I went into the other room and replaced Rip's overhead pictures with mine and played the tape.

Rip tried to cover up, but it was all over. Mo took over the company and Ripburger ran like the coward he was. It looked like the end. Mo was in charge. Corley Motors was saved. I was hoping to shower and get a tune-up.

It Ain't Over Until the Fat Man Dies

Me and Mo were heading off into the sunset when Ripburger attacked us with a semi. I hate trucks. Mo disappeared under the truck, but would later turn up OK. I grabbed onto the grill of the semi as my bike was stuck to the fender. I opened the grill, remembering my trip in Emmet's engine compartment earlier. I couldn't get in there because of the damn fan (I had an extra bunny with me and sacrificed it to the fan in an attempt to stop it – and I shed yet another tear for the bunny), so I tried something else. I tried to block Rip's view of the road by lifting up the panel. Rip used his cane to push it back down, but I quickly (and I do mean quickly) grabbed his cane from him and wedged it in the fan.

I climbed through the truck and decided to stop Ripburger by cutting off his fuel. That tie iron is the best thing I ever picked up. The Vultures had suddenly come after Rip in their

Ben feeling hot hot hot

converted plane. The semi flew into the plane when Rip applied some brakes. Ripburger tried to shoot me, but instead shot up the insides of the plane, which damaged the controls. We needed to stop as we were headed for the gorge that Emmet had met his demise at. I climbed up the ladder and found most of the systems damaged. Except one. It's amazing, the stopping power friction has... and a belly landing is *so* beautiful to watch.

When the plane stopped, it threw the semi back out the front of the plane. It also threw Ripburger out of the semi. He was hanging on one of the semi's guns. I needed to get off the damn thing, as it was hanging over the edge of the gorge, but I also needed to get my revenge on Ripburger. I couldn't shoot him, but I could retract the guns.

I climbed off the semi and the Vultures ran out of the plane, throwing off its balance. I needed to get out fast, but there was one thing still in the plane that I needed. What self respecting biker would leave his bike to fall to its fiery demise?

And that was it. Mo and I decided to be friends, the Polecats were out of jail, Corley got the funeral he deserved, and I headed off into the sunset. What, you want a happier ending where I get the girl? This ain't Hollywood, buddy...

Steve Bauman

... off into the sunset

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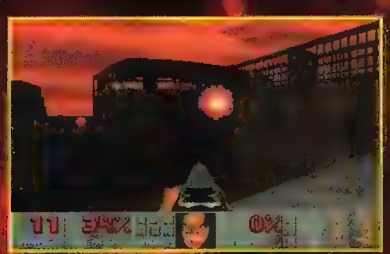

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The Daedalus Encounter

Daedalus Encounter is primarily composed of two different types of gameplay: interface puzzles, and logic puzzles. The interface puzzles are relatively easy to explain in a text format due to their linear nature, but the logic puzzles, in the same vein of the **7th Guest**, are extremely hard to explain, primarily due to the fact that there are multiple solutions. Hence, although this guide will help you through the interface puzzles, the logic puzzles are quite literally trial and error efforts. I will try to provide some minor tips and pointers at least explaining how to go about solving them.

The Daedalus academy

Right off the bat, after learning you are now a "brain in a box" – as Zack so eloquently puts it – Ari asks you to respond to her call. In order to do this, simply click the YES button on the interface screen or press <Y>. After a 50 hour space flight to the Draylak system, it's time to test out the probe. To do this, click on STARTUP, then DIAGNOSTICS and finally DEPLOY. Once the probe has been launched, you will be asked to identify the alien ship; to obtain an ID, select the ANALYSIS button. The ANALYSIS button is vitally important to the game; whenever you appear to be stuck, try selecting this button to see if any clues are revealed.

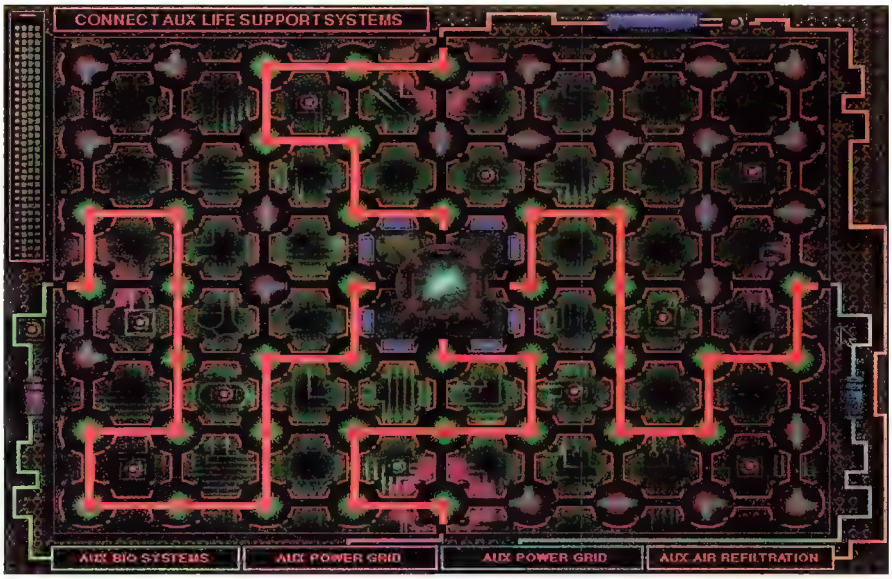
After approaching the ship, the probe comes up to the door of a Vakkar vessel. I've heard many horror stories about gamers not realizing the concept of the puzzle, and shooting a part of the door which causes a huge explosion. Hence, here's the solution: simply shoot the very small green sensor to open the door, and you can now enter the ship.

Inside the ship, turn on the FLOODLIGHT to illuminate the corridor. The game then drops into a navigation mode, where players can explore the ship – there's nothing particularly useful here, but you can click on the dead alien and see a "kick me" sign on his back. After 30 seconds the game will switch back into the interface mode, where you should select the GRAPPLE ARM to pick up the floating metal object. After obtaining it, perform an ANALYSIS as Ari suggests.

After leaving the ship, Zack will ask a somewhat rhetorical question about whether you want to travel to Mizar or not. No matter how you answer, you'll never arrive on Mizar, for the Artemis ship will crash. To find out what's wrong, run DIAGNOSTICS. This is the first logic puzzle of the game, which involves a power core and four power ports. Similar in concept to a puzzle in **The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain**, click the bi-directional relays to create four data lines. After completing the puzzle, perform the usual ANALYSIS on the ship, and activate the probe to explore the ship. Use the same sequence of actions as the training mission to start the probe.

The mission begins

Turn on the floodlight to illuminate the ship, and once again the game goes into an exploration mode. Click on the small green "hot spots" to navigate through the alien ship. The game resumes control after 15 seconds, and you approach a closed door. Running the familiar ANALYSIS will result in this door being photon reactive, meaning that it is sensitive to light. On the bottom of the interface is a multi-light control color spectrum, which will become a very vital part of the puzzle; make sure to study up on the color wheel! Click on the visible spectrum of color (VS), and click on any color of light to open the door.



The Artemis Power system puzzle

The next door presents a strange predicament to the crew, as Ari and Zack can't fit through it, but you can: it's hip to be a probe! After entering through the door, it is possible to navigate through the crew quarters. An important item shows up in this area, known by the name as an "orb." These orbs are the goal of the first segment of the game; six of them in all, behind six different doors (why do I feel like Monty Hall?). They can be acquired at different times: I'm simply presenting one way of obtaining them. To find the orb in the crew quarters, click on the forward chamber in the navigation window, and then spin to the right, and click on the middle group of three pods on the bottom. Then, the game will zoom in, and you must click on the upper-left pod. Surprise! An alien is guarding the Orb, but thankfully the probe's laser arms itself; simply shoot the alien to resolve this predicament. Select the GRAPPLE ARM to pick up the orb, and return through the door you entered.

After a somewhat overwritten and crude "bathroom" sequence, you return to the central hub and the next door. Since this is the only door in the game where you can't obtain the orb until a later time, don't worry. Run an ANALYSIS on the door; it will say "possible language found." In the bottom control bar, there is room for players to enter a small description of where the "light pattern" was obtained. For this door, type in "yellow." You will need this pattern later on in the game. Now, use the multi-light control to send a YELLOW pulse to the door, and it will open to reveal a puzzle with hexagons.

Puzzles incorporated

If you selected 'easy' difficulty on the main menu, you will only have to solve one variation of puzzles; medium calls for three solutions; and hard requires six solutions. For me, 'easy' was the best method, bar none, because the puzzles are extremely challenging. The first yellow puzzle requires the player to combine the six partial-hexagons around the perimeter to form a full hexagon in the center. After completing this task, the game unfolds with an extremely long cinematic sequence as you travel up to the observation deck.

An object appears on the observation deck: run an ANALYSIS on it, then click any color in the multi-light spectrum to open the shutters. Now the universe is in full view and another logic puzzle appears. This sun puzzle requires that all the hemispheres turn to yellow. It's a simple trial and error puzzle solved by changing colors. The Krinn Aliens will now enter the game, and a small action sequence will unfold: shoot 10 of the aliens in the video window to progress. Unfortunately, Zack blasts a hole in the window, and you must close the shutters. Do so as you opened them, with colored light.

The probe will start to malfunction; in order to bring it back on-line, you must run DIAGNOS-

Yellow door logic puzzle

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TICS.A puzzle is presented involving the probe's logic gates. A time limit puts the pressure on here; remember that you must close *all* the gates. Red and Green represent open and closed gates like a streetlight, and colors once again play an important role. After completing this puzzle, you will wind up again at the central hub.

The next door is blue in color. Follow the same procedure to open the door, making sure to record the pattern as the word "blue." The puzzle is very intriguing, using colored triangles; the goal is to mesh all six different triangle colors in the middle, without any overlapping to form gray triangles. After completing this puzzle, you will be transported up an elevator to the Meditation Chamber.

A grand alien statue appears on the horizon, and Zack, being the true Indiana Jones, goes off exploring what seems to be a vast new planet of terrain. He's quickly proven wrong as the whole planet was merely a hologram, and he falls into a crater hole. Casey is the man of the moment as you must rescue Zack from falling to his death. This so-called "thrust puzzle" is really another trial and error situation; the key is not to accelerate too fast.

If you rescue Zack successfully, next click ANALYSIS on the statue. The tests will reveal that it is photon reactive, so send any pulse from the multi-light spectrum its way and the statue pod will then fly out and morph into the Orbits puzzle. This puzzle is very tricky, but here's the key: *all of the planets can be moved in their orbits, except one.* Using the gravitational pull of planets, the goal is to move their orbits so that the one uncontrollable planet is in the sun's path, hence creating an eclipse. After solving this puzzle you must transmit the blue door color spectrum. Click on the orange sensor beside SEND to select the pattern, and the statue will then release the orb. If for some reason you forget to save the blue door pattern, transmit light in this order to receive the orb: blue, purple, yellow, green, red, and orange. Spin around and click on the elevator to return to the central hub.

Scanning through the rainbow, the next door color is Orange. Run the usual ANALYSIS and record the pattern. Send the color orange. This puzzle is called the rotating shapes, in which twelve objects are presented; when you click the mouse on one of them, it freezes. Clicking the object in the center of the hexagon will tell the shape to resume rotating, but in the opposite direction (i.e., backwards and forwards). The goal is to match the shapes into identical pairs.

After completing that door puzzle, the game drops you into navigation mode inside the ship's infirmary. Spin to the right and you should see an Orb holder – it is between the two right-most sick-bay pods. Click on the holder to "swim" over to it, and run an ANALYSIS. Send the pattern that you saved on the Orange door and the orb will release. Use the GRAPPLE ARM to grab it, and you are returned to the central hub.

The second to last door is Green, and using a procedure that should be old hat by now, run ANALYSIS and save the pattern. Send the color Green and the light reflection puzzle will appear. This is an *extremely* complicated logic puzzle, and very hard to describe on paper. In essence the puzzle starts with three colored bars: red, green, and blue. By clicking on one of the triangles, a reflector is installed, and the light ray changes direction. When these rays mix, they form secondary colors. The goal is to reflect the rays so they match the flashing points. For instance, reflect the blue ray through the other rays so it matches up with the flashing blue triangle.

For the maze impaired

After solving this puzzle, the Krinn attack the door and cause it to malfunction. First of all, grab the orb by spinning about-face and clicking forward. Run ANALYSIS and transmit the pattern you saved in front of the green door. Use the GRAPPLE ARM to retrieve the orb and turn around. Since the door has malfunctioned, Casey is forced to travel through a maze to the other side of the door. Here are the directions: Forward; Click on Floodlight; Forward Twice; Left, then Forward; Forward; Left, then Forward; Left, then Forward; Left, then Forward; Right, then Forward; and Forward. Now the game automatically opens the door and your faithful friends are rescued.

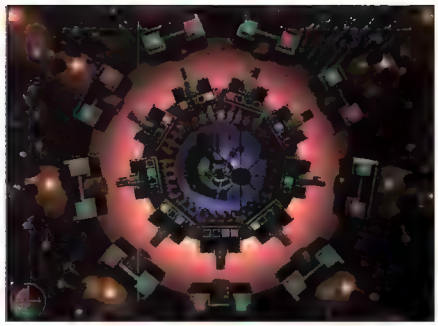
The last door is purple in color. Run the ANALYSIS and make sure to record the pattern as "purple." After transmitting the purple light pulse, yet another triangle puzzle will appear. This puzzle is slightly different from the others, primarily due to the fact that you battle wits with the computer. The goal is to create four connecting lines before the computer can. When you place a line on the grid, the computer will do the same. This puzzle is yet another effort in the trial and error column.

After the last door puzzle is complete you are flown into the Seminary Ring. By running ANALYSIS you can discover that all the panels are photon reactive. For each of the panels, send a different color of light, and then once you find the right color, record the color name and a representation of the symbol. Try all of the colors, as some of the panels have more than one symbol.

Leave the room after you have seen all 14 symbols. Ari will walk out on a platform, and a force field will trap her. Work fast, as you only have 10 seconds to save her life. Send the pattern you recorded from the purple door to turn off the force field! Good work! After returning to the central hub, Ari and Zack will mention that you have five orbs. In order to finish the game, you'll need to pick up another orb and retrieve an alien claw.

Tying up the loose ends

Spin right two doors to the yellow door; transmit a yellow pattern. Since the puzzle has already been solved, proceed forward. Spin to the left and click on the door. Spin right and you will see an orb holder. Run ANALYSIS and then send the pattern you discovered way back when you solved the yellow door puzzle. If you didn't record it, send a series of light pulses in this order; yellow, orange, purple, red, blue, and green. Select GRAPPLE ARM and retrieve the orb. Click on the door and spin to the left; click on the next door. Go forward, and exit from where you entered.

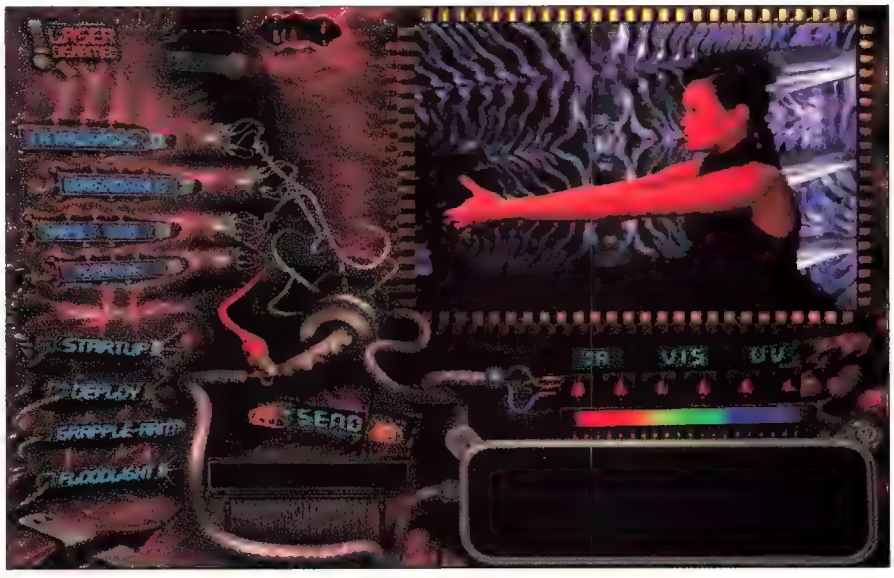


Logic gates puzzle

Now spin right another two doors to the orange door. Send an orange pulse, and proceed forward to the Infirmary. Spin left and click on the large robotic contraption. Run an ANALYSIS; surprise, it's photon reactive! Transmit Red, Blue, Orange, Purple, and Yellow. Transmitting a green will kill you. After these colors are transmitted an alien claw will fall to the ground. Spin to the right until you see the claw, then click on it. Select GRAPPLE ARM and retrieve the claw. Spin around and return to the central hub.

Now that you have discovered all six orbs and a claw, Ari and Zack will insert them into the contraption in the central hub, and you will enter the Chrysalis chamber. This is where the game branches off into a happy or sad ending. For dramatic effect, here's the solution to the happy ending, which requires quick timing, but avoids yet another logic puzzle. When the alien's chest starts to flash colors, click ANALYSIS and save the pattern. Now you need to send a word from those patterns you recorded on the panels behind the purple door. You need to send the first panel's green pattern to continue with the good ending. Now the alien puts up a force field that drops the temperature. Send a second pattern from the panels, that being the fourth panel's Red symbol. If you do this correctly, the game will finish in the happy ending. Congratulations, you've just completed **The Daedalus Encounter!**

Geoff Keighley



The main interface screen

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Crunch worries about air combat simulation getting stale and considers some genre infusion

After a genre's been around for a few years (hey, a decade, why not admit it!), you begin to think about the standards; what's been done, what the expectations are, what's left to do, what's interesting and what's not. The fact is that any genre (and not just in computer gaming) gets old after awhile. It reaches a point of saturation, its parameters get well-defined, the people trying to either work within those parameters or break out of them start doing things in ways that are easy to anticipate, etc.

On the other hand, nothing ever really gets left behind. As Pete Seeger once said, "Yeah, I borrow from Lee, but he borrows from everybody!" (so much for copyright obsession in the world of real folk music). Borrowing genre ideas and design ideas is the heart and soul of creativity, and when that borrowing ceases, whether through legislation, paranoia over property rights or just sheer lack of imagination, the genre dies – for awhile.

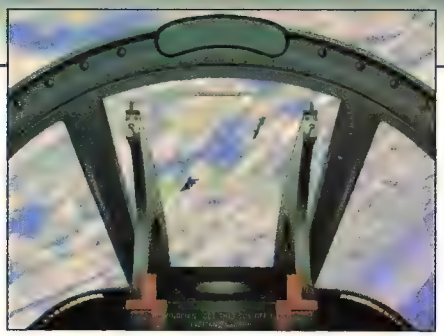
SU-27s in USNF are the most beautiful 3D objects out there

What happens to revive a genre is usually that it goes outside the terms it's used to working with and starts picking up ideas from areas that haven't happened yet. Aaron Copland throws an old Quaker hymn into *Appalachian Spring* (well, "throws" is probably not the right verb here!), Claes Oldenburg sculpts a giant baseball in metal, and so on.

What areas might air combat simulation touch on that it hasn't already? What are some of the strengths of other kinds of software design which might be incorporated (not just tacked on... tacked on is invariably tacky) to make the genre fly again? Let's look at a few possibilities.

The most obvious one – role-playing – is in full swing in a few efforts. There's always been a certain amount of role-playing in air combat simulation, especially in those games where some sort of career mode is in place. Role-playing amounts to climbing the ladder of success here, and maybe in a few instances commanding more of the process of the battle as you reach more strategic positions in the hierarchy. That's old already, was already there in the original **Gunship**, for instance, and can only be fleshed out with some more literalization of the process, say in **Top Gun** from *SpecHolo* or in other sims spending more time with cut-scenes. We chatted about that a bunch of issues back, too. So yeah, okay, role-playing – do-able, not a lot of excitement about the idea. Think about it further for a sec. What do people like in CRPGs? Story, for one. *Origin*. Did that, been there, got the t-shirt. Hack 'n slash. What air combat sim *isn't* hack 'n slash? Stats. Ditto. Puzzles. How would you do puzzles in an air combat sim? Ah, now *there*'s an interesting question. *Flights of Mike* book series, there's a clue, folks. Puzzles with story. Let's get weird – how about an adventure game you fly through? With real air combat sim-style activity? Ten years from now, maybe.

Strategy gaming. Again, **Falcon 3.0**. **F-16 Combat Pilot** or **Tornado** (*Digital Integration*). **AV8B Harrier** (*Domark*). Been there, done that. Well, but how well, actually? I know many people are going to pooh-pooh the simulation potentials of **Across the Rhine**, for instance, but imagine a refined version of that system implementing a *really* good real-time wargame in sync with an air combat sim. Let's see what happens with **EF2000**: looks like it might go that way a bit. Real-time tactical "wargaming" is what's always happening in a combat simulation, so that's no news; implementing an effective strategic perspective, especially a historical one, one that's dynamic instead of based on more static mission- or scenario-oriented design, would be something new. Or am I missing something here? Oh yeah – **SWOTL**. Did that, did it pretty well, actually – the sim-heads didn't get it. Never sold as well as it should have.



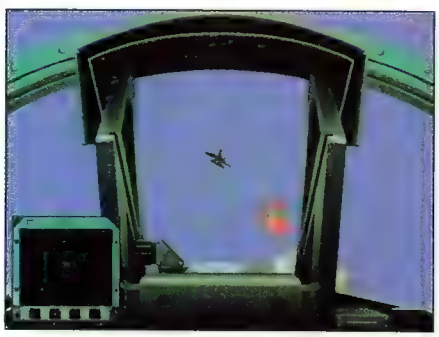
Worrying about your Wingie is a classic role-playing experience

Arcade gaming. Feh! Air combat sims are *always* arcade games at some level, let no-one fool you 'bout that. On the other hand, let's see if anyone can ever do a combo-platform game and air combat simulation. Nah, impossible, no-one would buy it, wouldn't work, it's total apples and oranges. Would be pretty hilarious if it were possible, though. **Sonic Tactical Fighter**. **Stealth Mario**. Weird. Just plain weird.

Sports. They're also "serious" simulations of a sort. Aye, there's the rub. If you're doing a serious simulation, cross-borrowing of other genres too literally isn't possible. There was never a "Nazis vs. Belgians" World Cup air combat situation. War isn't a game. You gotta borrow the systems, not the basic genre. What systems in sports games would work in a serious air combat simulation? Hmm, the mind blanks, at least at this end. Aerobatics – whoops! It's already there. **Flight Unlimited** – but where's the competition? The heroes, the announcers, the fans? **Indy Car Racing**, **NASCAR Racing** – see, it works! And look how well. What's the equivalent for air combat?

That kind of brain-storming should go on, and in the right corners, it probably is. It's clear that many aspects of air combat simulation are being picked up by other kinds of games – look at first-person 3D, look at ground- and sea- based simulations, they've all derived many of their innovative power from ideas which originated in flight simulation.

Time to turn the borrowing process around, guys. Don't worry too much about realism while you're at it, either. Later. Crunch out.



Missile launch – it's an arcade game! Pow!

All screenshots from Electronic Arts' ***US Navy Fighters***

MechWarrior II

The lovely scenery at the Wolf Clan's training grounds

The long wait is finally over. *Activision* has finally put the finishing touches on **MechWarrior II**, arguably the most hotly awaited game in recent memory. Sporting a complete rework of the game from the abortive demo version which floated around last summer, the game stands to benefit from a full-court press by *Activision*'s PR department. The game has its own World Wide Web site (check out http://www.activision.com if you're interested), a built-in core audience (aficionados of the previous **MW**, the board games, and the Virtual World game) and plenty of net interest. And now I've got the review copy in my formerly nicotene-stained CD-ROM drive.

So, was it worth the wait? Well, that's going to depend on what you were waiting for, as well as what kind of system you have to run it on.

Activision has been very forthcoming that the minimum system requirements will be higher than the average game. The bare minimum system that the game will run on is a mid-range 486 with 8MB of RAM. I just happen to have a 486-33 with 8MB and was able to get it to run at acceptable performance after a couple of hours of memory-tweaking. My advice is to turn off anything and everything that your computer will run without, including EMM386. *Activision* includes an option to make a boot disk, but it did little more than comment out various lines in my existing CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files. This is quite a step down from the more pro-active system used by *LucasArts* games, but it does recognize multiple configurations, which is a step in the right direction. Normal installation requires about 50MB of space on your hard drive; and you can use up over 100MB if you install the movies to your drive.

The game takes place during the war between the Clans Wolf and Jade Falcon in 3057. The player can play through a career in either Clan, or can opt for instant combat against any of 6 Clans in a preset Trial of Grievance (pretty much just an excuse to go out and blow things up). For a Trial, you can select from several planets to hold the battle on, as well as select and customize (yes, customize!) mechs for both your and the enemy's stars (sorry, purists, but *Activision* says a star is three 'mechs). You then drop and duke it out until you drop, or manage to destroy several times your weight in enemies.

The Career game is, of course, much more interesting. There is a training course for you to work out the bugs in your piloting abilities, and it is quite challenging trying to keep that little Firemoth (or Dasher, to you freebirth scum) in one piece. When you feel you are ready for it, you can undertake a mission and begin your path to the office of Khan. The missions look to be quite challenging, with a variety of land and air assets arrayed against you.

Mech operation is fully configurable, so you should be able to use whatever rig you prefer for this game. I tried to get my *Gravis* **Phoenix** set up for this review, but gave it up and relied on my keyboard and trackball, which served admirably. Be warned, there are a lot of features that you will be using, and you may be hard-pressed to program everything into the buttons of your **WCS**.

Mech piloting is not an easy task, and gaining proficiency at this game is no different. The cadet training missions are designed to get you through the learning curve, and I highly recommend them. I'm not that bright, so I dived right into the fray and paid for it dearly. I'm now going back through cadet training and should be a better pilot for it.

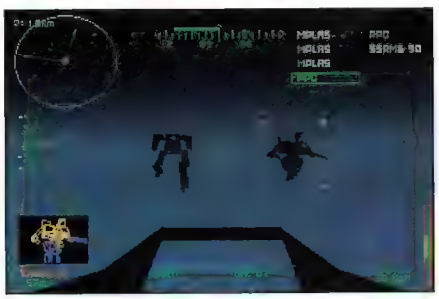
Promised for **MWII** is complete modem and network (8-players!) playability. This will not ship with the game, but a 2-player demo is supplied. I wasn't able to test this out, but will as soon as I get a second copy.

Performance-wise, your satisfaction will rely heavily upon the speed of your system, the speed and memory of your video card, and the amount of disk space you can afford to devote to the game. On my system, the game is rather "pagey", kind of like looking at a flip-book animation one page at a time. Once I have been playing for a while, my brain seems to adjust to it, but it still doesn't look that great. Word has it that this game positively rocks on a Pentium, and I believe it. I plan to upgrade soon, so I'll send you a postcard from the front when I do.

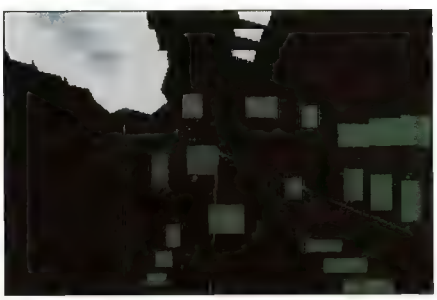
Nick Svolos

Designed by: **Activision**
Published by: **Activision**
Platform: **DOS**

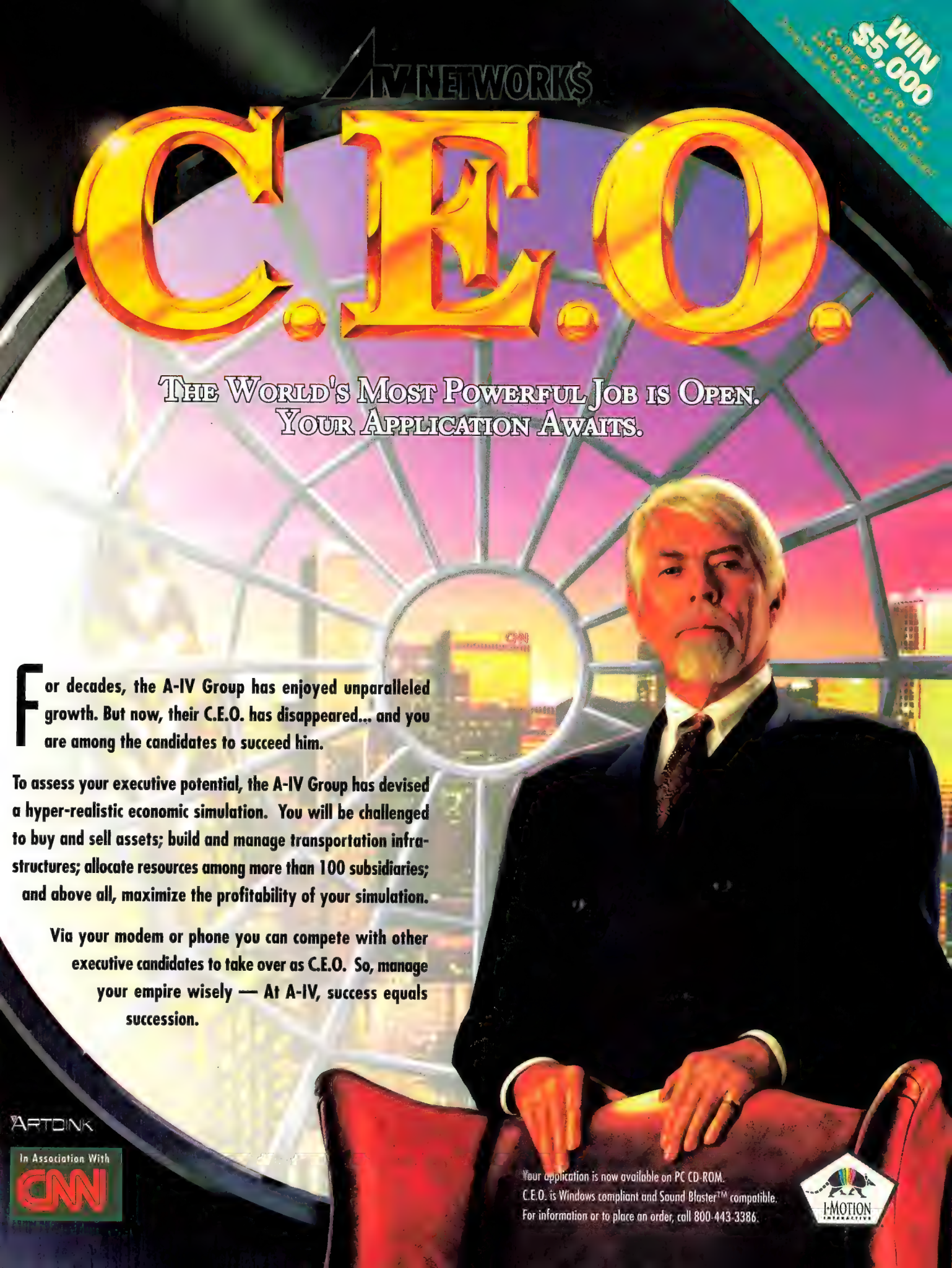
Scoring a hit



In combat vs. the Ghost Bears



Satellite view of me getting my butt kicked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Frontier: First Encounters

Making a bee-line for Hope

Frontier: First Encounters (**FFE**) is a sequel to **Frontier**, which in turn was a sequel to **Elite**. The **Elite** series has a good following among "serious" computer gamers due to the efforts of David Braben to model the game on realistic physical models and an astronomically "correct" universe. The series has been characterized by an opened ended system (go anywhere, do anything) involving trade and space combat in a vast universe. It has also been characterized by several annoying bugs and outdated graphics. **FFE** fits perfectly into the series.

The Good

There is a lot to like about **FFE**. There are a large number of planets to visit, some 40+ ships that you can buy and upgrade, a variety of materials to trade in, and a number of "careers" to investigate. You can try your hand at trading, flying military missions, bounty hunting, transporting passengers, smuggling and even assassination. Particularly enjoyable is the way you are kept informed of what is happening in the world. There are five newspapers to read and a fully implemented Bulletin Board System. The newspapers supply valuable hints and the BBS system is vital for finding contracts and selling items on the black market.

Unfortunately, as is the case with most games of this type, in order to advance your rank (getting the coveted Elite rating), a large number of combat kills are required. As with *Origin's* **Privateer**, this almost forces you into the more combat-oriented careers and their associated ships – few of which are acceptable for trading. To **FFE**'s credit, the space combat model is *not* like **Wing Commander III**, **TIE Fighter**, or **X-Wing**. In other words, it attempts to model some aspects of Newtonian physics, while maintaining an element of playability (unlike *MicroProse's* **Mantis**). This makes space combat challenging and somewhat frustrating, but in the end it will leave you satisfied with each and every kill (you earned them).

The game comes with a 139 page manual explaining basic ops and an anthology of short stories based on the Frontier world. All the elements of a superior space exploration game are found in the **FFE** game engine.

The Bad

Can we all say – BUGS? The European versions of **FFE** were plagued with a large number of bugs, which were supposedly fixed in the US version. Unfortunately this is not the case. There are missions that upon selection cannot be completed, missions that cause crashes, a really flaky mouse driver and very poor joystick support. In fact, when first booted up, spacecraft control was impossible. It continually flew in circles and no amount of tweaking would stop it.

It turns out that the game has joystick support (undocumented), but *no* joystick calibration process! If you have a joystick with trim pods, you can go to the Galactic map (F3, F5) and stop its rotation by adjusting the trim pods. Your joystick is now calibrated. Those of you who have joysticks without trim pods will have to unplug the joystick before starting **FFE**. To *GameTek's* credit, they have promised to make a patch available by the time this review is published.

Another problem is the manual. While detailed, there is no index, it is written in condescending manner ("The Idiots Guide To....") and there are no troubleshooting guidelines. Including a map to the star system as well as a guide to the various factions found in the game should have been automatic. Those who haven't followed the **Elite** series will have a hard time sorting out the pros and cons of working for the Empire, Alliance or Federation.

The Ugly

First impressions of **FFE's** graphic engine is "polygons gone wild." While not really ugly, after playing the likes of **Wing Commander III** and **US Navy Fighters**, they are uninspiring. In other words, the graphics engine is functional but outdated. All the ships have the same control panel with the same ugly icons, but once you get used to the control process it becomes functional. The full video motion is simply annoying, and the music becomes repetitive after a while; fortunately both can be turned off.

What's the bottom line? This is a hard call. **FFE** is a commendable effort, but with the present bugs, it's hard to recommend. Hard-core **Elite** and **Frontier** fans will doubtlessly buy the product. For the rest of you, wait for the patched version. Information on **FFE** as well as bugs lists and hints can be found on the World Wide Web at http://www. dur. ac. uk/~d3p9d1/firstenc. html and http://www. maths. tcd. ie/~ratava/frontier/ffe. html.

Alan Fusco

Designed by: **David Braben**
Published by: **GameTek**
Platform: **PC**

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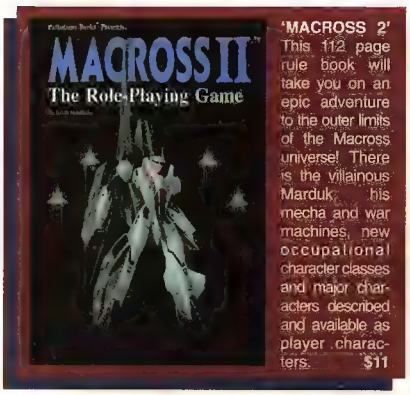

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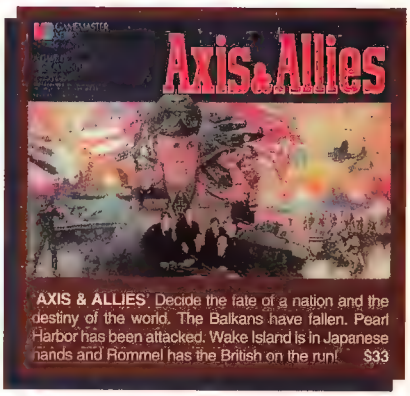

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Air Combat Advisor: Combat Basics 1: Closing

Your current situation/condition should dictate whether to make a run for home or fight.

In air combat terms, the Closing stage doesn't signify the end of the battle. In fact, it is just the opposite. This is really where the battle begins. In this stage, Closing means getting closer. To pin it down exactly, it is the stage between Detection and Attack. The transition from Closing to Attack is determined by weapons range.

As you probably already know, the Closing stage is very important. Making wrong decisions here at the beginning of the battle can ruin an engagement. Just as a quick review, the five stages of air combat are: *Detection, Closing, Attack, Maneuver, and Disengage*. We've already discussed Detection briefly.

Whether or not you've identified the second and/or third of the three "W"s (Where, What, and Who), as Pilot In Command (PIC), you have to make an assessment of your present situation and mission goals. Unless you're flying with fool proof, working IFF (Identify Friend or Foe) equipment and radar, closing on a bogey (unidentified aircraft) is the only sure way to find those last two "W"s. Even though both situation and mission goals are separate criteria, both must be considered to make a good Closing decision. This is why we'll cover each individually. But first we should lay out some basic ground work, since things happen pretty quickly from here on in.

Heads or tails

It's important first to set some conventions we'll be using in our air combat discussions. Fighters are basically flying weapon platforms. Again, to keep things simple, let's use high perf props for our examples. Generally, the nose of a fighter is the most dangerous end of the aircraft. All areas are vulnerable; however, the most vulnerable is usually the tail. With props, we have four possible situations. In the order of most desirable to least desirable, we have Head to Tail (H2T), Tail to Tail (T2T), Head to Head (H2H), and Tail to Head (T2H). The convention is your airplane first in relation to the other airplane. In a H2T situation, the Head or nose of your aircraft is facing any other part of the other aircraft other than the nose. While some pilots would place H2H as more desirable than T2T, the hierarchy is based on danger to you, not offensive ability.

In modern aircraft with BVR (Beyond Visual Range) weapons capability, closure stage distances can be very large.

Offense or defense

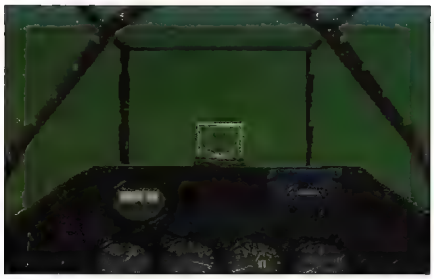
Next, it is important to categorize each situation as either offensive, defensive, or both. Yes, some situations can be both offensive and defensive at the same time. Some tacticians would categorize those situations as neutral, but I see them as being both offensive and defensive. Anytime your opponent has his nose pointed at you, you are defensive. Anytime your nose is pointed at your opponent, you are offensive. Thus, in the case of a H2H relation, you are both offensive and defensive. A T2T orientation is categorized as neutral. Naturally, all of these are based on the assumption that both parties have ammunition. Range also plays a big role. If both of you are outside of weapons range, these don't apply.

Situation relation

As mentioned earlier, Closing takes place outside of weapons range. If you're already offensive or defensive, you've jumped to the Attack or Maneuver stages, so let's back up. When faced with a Closing situation, you must decide two things: If and How. Let's discuss the If part now. Your decision on whether or not to proceed to the Closing stage can be decided based on your current condition. If you are low on things (ammo, fuel, and/or airplane parts!), you may want to make a break for home, in which case you'd jump directly to Disengage stage. However, it should be noted that your current situation can be directly related to your enemy's current situation as well. If it's just you and your wingie vs. a squadron, you may decide that mixing it up with them might be more challenging than your aircraft could handle.

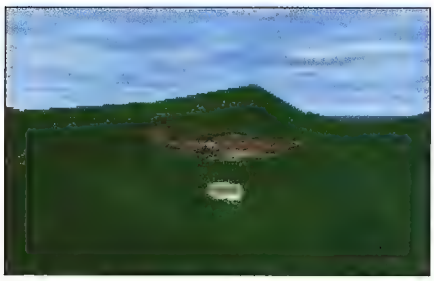
Mission specific

Your mission goals will also dictate whether or not you'll even want to proceed to the Closing stage. For example, if your primary objective is to bomb a target, you may choose to hit your target and deal with air threats later. Since we generally talk about fighter tactics here in *The Air Combat Advisor* (*TACA*), we'll talk about more traditional fighter missions such as CAP, Sweep, or Escort. In these types of missions your situation has more bearing on whether or not you'll proceed with Closing. In all traditional fighter missions, if you can fight, you fight. It's a no brainer. This brings us to another of many "rules of thumb" (*TACA* fight-



The value of altitude is inversely proportional to your aircraft's performance. The higher your aircraft's performance, the less valuable altitude is. Many modern jets and missiles can accelerate while flying straight up; the advantages of altitude over your opponent are slim to none. Take it if you can get it, but be aware of the pitfalls.

Releasing an external fuel tank will increase your aircraft performance. This P-51B in 1942:PAW gained about 50 KIAS.



If you're carrying an external fuel tank, now (the closing stage) is the time to drop it off.

er doctrine, if you will) to be passed along throughout our discussions.

TACA commandments

Due to the lack of a more creative name, we'll call these "rules" *TACA* Commandments. This month's commandment: BE AGGRESSIVE. The old cliché "the best defense is a good offense" applies in air combat. We'll talk about how to become more aggressive some other time, but for now we'll just leave it at this. The concept here is that by being aggressive and taking the initiative, you can force your opponent to take a defensive posture. This puts him in a bad position and you in a good position, simply because if your opponent is defensive he can't shoot at you.

Some people argue that being so aggressive is unrealistic; that since we fly sims and aren't putting our real lives on the line, we fly without realistic concerns for our personal safety. That's true; as sim pilots, we don't put our actual lives on the line. But if you spend some time reading about real fighter pilots, you'll discover that they make (made) every attempt not to think about getting killed or shot down. Doing so hinders your performance and abilities. The best real fighter pilots were thus aggressive, and the more aggressive they are

After you've made the decision to proceed with closure, make note of the bearing and heading of important things such as the way home, your bombing target, or in this case, the box of bombers you're protecting.

(were), the higher the kill ratio. So be aggressive and take the fight to your enemy and don't worry about "realism" for now. This will give you maximum separation from the asset you're protecting or put you closest to the target your trying to take out. Remember, though, aggressive doesn't necessarily mean suicidal.

Position magician

This brings us to How. Naturally your current position in relation to your enemy/target will dictate your Closing strategy. While the traditional time-and-battle tested approaches still apply, advanced modern fighter aircraft have rendered some of them relatively unimportant. Therefore, those flying under powered WWI aircraft can make the best use of this information. Most of you probably know some of this basic material, already, so the following will be a brief review.

P. A. S. S. S.

Position, Altitude, Speed, Surprise, and Sun. This little acronym PASSS says it all. A good way to remember PASSS is to think of air combat starting with a first PASSS. Individually, each element yields its own advantage, so the more of these you can achieve, the greater your advantage. Let's review each. For Position against fighters, you want to gain a position in the order of preference we discussed earlier. H2T, T2T, H2H, then T2H. Naturally, unless you can Surprise (the second "S") your enemy, he will attempt to maneuver so that you'll gain as few advantages as possible.

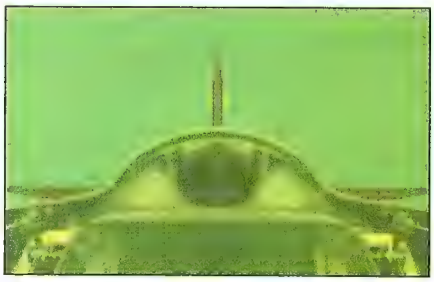
Take the high road

In the early days of air combat, the advantage of Altitude was legendary. However, modern aircraft and weapons nullify altitude advantage. Take it if you can get it anyways. Everyone knows altitude can be traded for speed, and speed can be exchanged for altitude. However, you should be aware of your aircraft's performance envelope (remember *TACA* commandment Know Thy Aircraft?). Altitude and speed can be a good thing, but there is such a thing as too much of either, and it can eliminate your advantage.

On another level, don't sacrifice too much of one for the other. Moderation might describe what you're after. Generally it's better to have a little of each than to be high and slow, or low and fast. There are of course exceptions to this, but for now, moderation is safe because it doesn't present any inherent disadvantages.

Fun in the sun

Interestingly enough, the sun remains a significant factor even in the world of modern fighter air combat. It can be used in both offensive and defensive tactics. In an offensive capacity, use the sun to hide your approach. This can help you gain the element of surprise. This is pretty difficult to do, so don't put too much effort into it. However, if the luck of the draw puts you in a position where you're able to use the sun, take advantage of it.



Use the sun to hide your approach. It is very effective against human opponents but varies with computerized bandits. AI opponents must wear those polarized goggles.

Final tips

Before closing on the enemy, make note of the bearing of important way points and/or landmarks. Note where things are, such as which way leads home, where bombers and targets are. As mentioned earlier, from here on in things get hairy. Better to get your bearings straight now while you're not being fired upon. It will save you from having to waste time and energy during battle just to figure out where things are.

Until next time – fight the fight you want to fight.

Ben Chiu

Reality vs. Simulation: Life In a P-51 Mustang

The dawn's early light bursts through the mist onto the shining blue and silver Mustang. It looks positively prehistoric perched out alone on the Florida tarmac, surrounded by the steamy, emerald jungle.

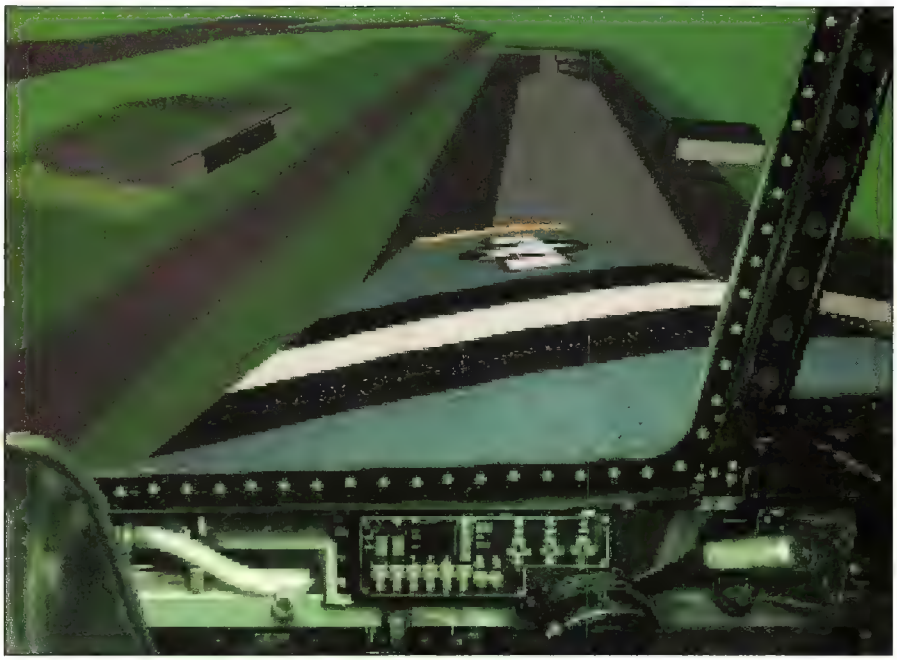
The place is Kissimmee, Florida. Our mission is to fly the real Mustang and then discover which PC flight simulator has the most accurate-feeling Mustang in comparison. In the end, the answer is surprising. This is a duel controls version, the TF-51D. According to the owner and navy top gun graduate, Don Schultz, this version and the World War II version handle very much alike. So what is it like to fly the real Mustang through spins, rolls, loops, hammerheads and stalls among other maneuvers?

Overall, the Mustang feels very solid. It weighs about three tons, after all it is, as Doug Schultz reminds me, designed solely to bring six heavy machine guns to bear on a target. The stick has no play in it, unlike some airplanes. Move the stick even slightly at 200 knots and the Mustang responds instantly and positively. Stop the stick and the Mustang stops instantly. Roll the airplane from side to side as hard as you can, and the response is instant. It feels like driving a sports car with rack and pinion steering. This surprises you, because the airplane weighs so much. In roll at cruising speed there is no "inertia," or so little you do not notice it. Roll is instantaneous but not jerky. A video taken of the whole flight confirms this. Pitch the airplane up and down as hard as you dare. It is almost instantaneous. However, you *do* notice a little more lag present in the pitch than is present in the roll axis. Slow the Mustang down below 150 knots, however, and the controls get progressively more spongy.

The stick overall definitely resists you. Over about two inches of stick travel and you get strong resistance. However, the Mustang does not respond much to small stick movements! To get big responses, you need big stick movements. When you move the stick and stop it, it goes exactly where you put it and stays there. You can plan your maneuvers exactly. This is part of its being so positive in control. It is tight. It has no looseness. This is one airplane which does not bounce around. It feels as if it is on rails, as long as you are not touching the controls. Even doing spins and half snap rolls it goes solidly, leisurely. Stomp on the rudder pedal and let go. It takes one leisurely swing and then three almost unnoticeable ones. Drag the nose up 45 degrees and let go. It slowly drifts back down in 5 seconds. Force the wings over into a 45 degree bank and let go. They pretty much stay there with a slight tendency to return slowly to level flight. It feels as if you are captaining a ship, compared to flying a little airplane: after all, ten feet of long, heavy nose looms out in front of you from the front seat.

You are always aware of the Mustang's weight when flying it, yet it is extremely tight on the controls. Drop down to fifty feet above a lake. Do hard maneuvering in turbulence. It seems rock steady. You trust it implicitly, as long as you know where its flight envelope is. It seems to go almost in slow motion where you put it because you have so much control. Yet the nose moves quickly to a ground target and stays there! What a gun platform! However, don't get me wrong – even though it *is* solid, the P-51 still moves very quickly and nimbly if you use enough muscle.

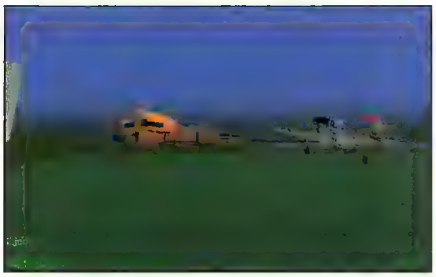
Always keep an eye on the numbers when playing a sim.



Check the view off the starboard wing before landing.

Now you know how it feels: in a few words, solid, tight and terribly positive, with no lag in roll and almost none in pitch. Which PC flight simulator most accurately models this? We tried the old *Kesmai* **Air Warrior** (which should not stand a chance with its older flight model), *Dynamix*'s **Aces over Europe** (another even more primitive flight model), *MicroProse*'s **Pacific Air War: 1942** and the flashing-new but still early public beta, *Domark*'s **Confirmed Kill** with its new force-based flight model. Which is the winner? Obviously, one of the newer ones, right? Nope; this is not what we find. Read on. To judge the answer we use one overriding criterion: which flight simulated Mustang captured the overall feel the best? We will use the two hour video and notes from the flight for comparison.

First, we examine the Mustang in **Aces over Europe**. Its flight model lacks stall buffeting, stability differences and has an incorrect jet-like roll rate (much too fast at 1.8 seconds. Flight tests show about four seconds). It is tight and positive.



The Mustang is a heavy plane but flies wonderfully.

Air Warrior gets it right - the latest isn't always the greatest.

In pitch it captures my video almost exactly. In roll however, it is too loose. Perhaps the jet-like roll rate causes this. Yank it into a tight turn at 200 knots and it incorrectly never stalls or buffets. The reality bubble bursts immediately. Throw it into a dive and instantly the airspeed dial is reading too high. Slow it up to 150 knots and it incorrectly acts nearly the same as it does at 250 knots. To conclude, the *Dynamix* Mustang is *nearly* correct in feel. However, the excessively fast roll rate and lack of stall buffeting end it right there.

Second is **PAW 1942**. This models torque, inertia, and stall buffeting well but fails to represent stability differences. Instantly, you notice that the Mustang has too much inertia in roll and pitch. It takes way too long to stop rolling or pitching. It is very sloppy in controls. The reality bubble bursts again. Slow it up once more, it acts incorrectly, nearly the same at 150 knots as at 250. Stick the nose down and almost instantly you are incorrectly at 300+ knots from level. However, roll it into a turn and it correctly seems to enter the stall buffet at the correct times, from 200 and 250 knots. It rides in the stall buffet just like the real airplane. Nice effort, but in the same category as **AOE** for realism.

Now let's try our third contestant, **Confirmed Kill** (public beta version). This models stability differences for the first time as well as torque and inertia, and includes a force model. The first thing you notice is that when you raise the nose for take-off, it's bouncy like a beach ball. Goodbye, reality, right there. The rudder is also too bouncy. Oh well, this is still beta and a lot of time remains to tweak the flight model. You roll it and the inertia is much too great. Roll into a turn from 200 knots and it hits the stall buffet accurately. Roll into it from 250 knots, though, and it behaves the same as it did at 200 knots. However, **Confirmed Kill** has the potential – with its many fresh modeling features – to be the best someday, if the designers tweak it enough. Not yet, though.

Finally, jump into the **Air Warrior** Mustang, which has by far the oldest flight model. It lacks torque, inertia and stability differences. However, its reason for existence is to be hyper realistic. Roll it and pitch it. It is solid, tight, and positive, with no lag in roll and almost none in pitch! They nail it! It flies as if it is on rails. Great! Lower the airspeed to 150 knots, it acts logey and sluggish. Throw it into a dive from 200 knots. It takes awhile to get to 300 knots. All right! Roll it into a bank and it gets to the stall buffet correctly from 200 and 250 knots. Turn it and bank it hard at 50 feet. Wow! This looks like the video! No other simulated Mustang does all this!: so far so good. Now press on the rudder pedal and release. It does not oscillate: too bad. The reality bubble bursts. Climb in a turn at low speed and high power. You incorrectly feel no torque trying to pull you off to the side.

Even though **Air Warrior** nails the feel for pitch and roll, it feels as if it is just a little too much on rails overall. However, it is not enough to be distracting. Overall, **Air Warrior** has the outstanding feel, with a few exceptions.

Which one wins? All four have shortcomings. The answer lies in which one keeps our reality bubble alive the longest. The clear winner is the old **Air Warrior**. In normal flight maneuvers, it takes the longest to bust our reality bubble. In addition, no other simulated Mustang has that very positive, tight, instantaneous, solid feel to it like the real Mustang. It acts sloppy at slow speeds, as it should. It also hits the stall buffet right on at fast and slow airspeeds. *Kesmai* wins it according to the video and notes made during real flight, with just a few misses. **Air Warrior** is the surprising winner. Please, *Kesmai*, do not change this feel in the future. Everyone else – pay attention!

Richard Ordway

Apache

Interactive Magic's *full-scale attack helicopter simulation makes final*

It's been a long cold spell between major new simulation releases – sure, there've been a few significant updates, add-ons and experiments, but nothing with the depth and ground-breaking innovation of a **Falcon 3.0** or **Red Baron** has really appeared... until now.

Here's one simulation that's been well worth the wait. *Digital Integration* and *Interactive Magic* have proven with **Apache** that they're now *the* simulation designers to contend with for the '95-'96 air combat crown. Nothing since **F3**'s come anywhere near as close as this design to providing real sim-heads the whole panoply of options and details guaranteed to make the software a keeper.

We outlined the preliminary specs for **Apache** in a feature article a few issues back, and the wonderful news in final release is that the ambitious program has been implemented virtually intact. Truth be told, the original design spec looked well beyond what we secretly worried was really possible in a PC-based commercial sim, given the time and resource constraints typical for the development of such a project.

DI and *IM* have come through, though; **Apache** provides unprecedented depth as well as unprecedented flight modeling, especially in the helicopter arena, one area where no-one's really ever put together a chopper flight model bound to be utterly convincing.

Apache's flight modeling is very much like **Flight Unlimited**'s, in the sense that once you step into the cockpit for the aircraft being modeled, there's none of that sneaking suspicion you're working with something scaled way back for playability. The *feel* of the helicopter is right. The combination of engine, rotor and collective control – assignable to everything from keyboard to full *Thrustmaster*-style peripheral stick interface complement – synchronizes incredibly smoothly, lending the simulation that silky, precise, just-right quality you'd normally experience only in, say, a test-drive of an *Acura* NSX (pick your favorite equivalent). The physics of motion in the design have an extremely fine level of granularity, which means both fine control and plausible inertia in response to input. You're not just guiding a few data points around the screen with a mouse, the way you feel like you are in some other simulation efforts.

Most importantly in the flight modeling, **Apache** feels like a helicopter, a rotary-wing craft, not a fixed-wing craft. Try this out when you first get the sim: get into training mode with full realism on and just practice slow, careful landings at base. Notice the crosswind effect. Notice the ground effect when you near the ground. Notice the need, if there's a wind blowing, of having to fly *into* the wind a bit to stay steady and level as you try to touch down without any forward or backward motion. Then notice the A-10s landing at the nearby runway, then taxiing – all at real-time speed and motion – over to their park spots – better not be in the way!

Which leads to the other side of **Apache**, its air combat environment. Once again: nothing on the planet has come even close to this thing yet. It's all dynamic; you're in a full, live situation, and events are going on all the time around you. Sure, this is bound upon full, in-depth many-hours play to lead to some possible oddities (haven't found any yet here, though), but the advantages of *knowing* you're not in some static, fixed situation as you initiate a mission is excitement itself. You can never predict where your opponents are going to show up, or how. This leads to some pretty sophisticated tactical thinking as you enter your mission.

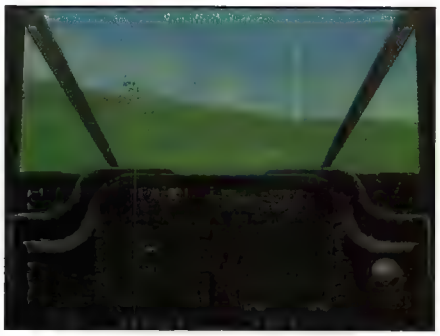
It's live, but it's not chaos. The mission editor, valuable of course for creating an indefinite variety of new missions, is also something you can use to tailor individual missions for specific tests, or to enter mission play in an entirely fresh way. Tired of flying from point A to point B to point C and then to point X to get into the heat of things? Move point A with the mission editor and change the whole dynamics of the mission. Yeah, you can do that. Excellent! Want to make different use of the terrain while flying a mission, or disagree with the designers on mission parameters? Change it – the system responds wonderfully. And with *DI*'s cutting-edge mission designer, it's just a few clicks to handle – or a few hours of study if that's what you feel like. Set it up and get going or make an evening of evaluating a particular mission's variables, your choice. Both are a blast.

Finally, the career/campaign. Again, *DI* and *IM* have *really* nailed it down proper with the included career/campaign engine. It's simple. You're *there*, living through *your* particular successes and failures, as you advance your career by advancing the campaign. This is the kind of role-playing that'll have you up late at night in bed, worrying not about how work's going to be the next day but how you're going to handle the T-80s that intelligence indicates are between you and your next mission objective. There's a hill you can use, but you really want to use Hellfires. Hellfire A or Hellfire B? With the latter you can pop up, lase the target, fire, then duck down, all the while calculating how long it'll take for the missile to get to target. At the last possible moment you can pop up again and re-lase the target, to guarantee the H-B will find its home. Marvelous! H-B it is. Just one tiny example.

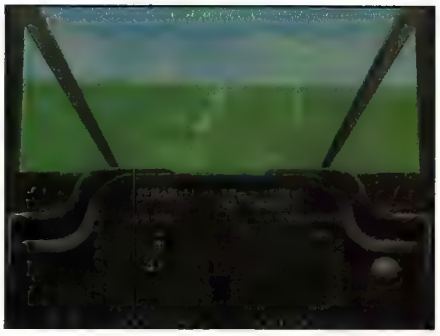
From weapons control to campaign system, and everywhere in between, **Apache**'s just got all the competition beat cold. This is a simulation you'll be playing, and playing, and playing, month after month, year after year. Absolutely a must-have. Enjoy!

Steve Wartofsky

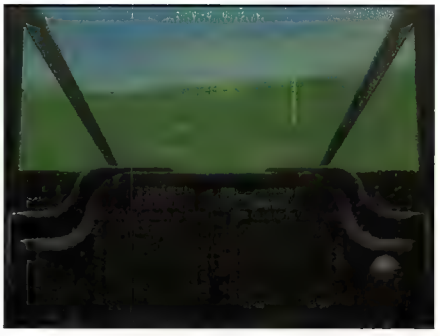
Designed by: **Digital Integration**
Published by: **Interactive Magic**
Platform: **DOS**



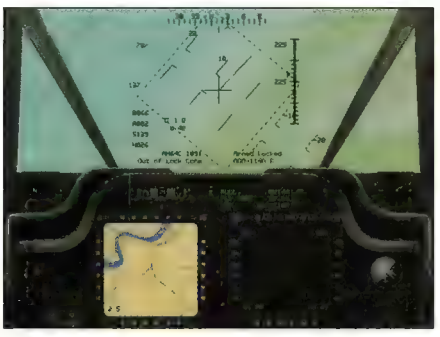
Lock onto friendlies to keep track of where they are, but don't shoot! You'll be reprimanded at best



Hydras won't do much to a bunker but they're all we have left



Stay low to keep out of SAM's radar cone



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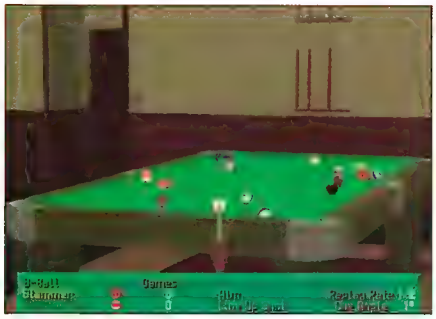
Virtual Pool



Virtual Pool, by *Celeris*, is a pool simulation for IBM PC compatibles. It includes four variants of pool, straight pool, 8-ball, 9-ball, and rotation. Network and modem play is supported, and some strong computer opponents are provided. Game play is pretty much what you would expect; a player takes a shot by moving the cue via mouse. Keyboard commands provide additional functions such as changing the view, moving the cue ball, and putting English on the ball. Stroking the cue is also done via mouse, the harder you stroke the mouse, the harder the cue strikes the cue ball.

The simulation itself is beautiful. Just about anything you can legally do on a pool table can be done here. You can practice masse shots without risk of marring the table. The only thing I haven't managed to do is get the cue ball to jump off the table. The developers may not have added a third dimension to the ball's movement, so I suspect this may never be possible.

That's where most pool simulations stop, but *Celeris* just keeps on going. Since the game is shipped on a CD, there is plenty of room to pack in multimedia goodies, and they took advantage of it. A complete tutorial on the rules of pool is there, as well as a database of trick shots, with full-motion video (or what passes for it nowadays) starring "Machine-gun" Lou Butera, a retired pool champ. Having learned to play by word of mouth, I was surprised to learn some rules that I had never heard of before, so reviewing the rules sections is a must. Meanwhile, watching Lou sink a rack of balls in about a minute and a half will fill any of us with humility.

Many high-quality video systems are supported, but it looks great on my bargain-basement VESA card. All major sound cards can be used as well, but my ancient 8-bit Sound Blaster seems to have a problem with their driver. For the record, *Interplay* is distributing the game, which requires a 386 or higher, a VGA or SVGA display and card, a mouse, a CD-ROM drive and 2 MB of free memory. Network, modem and serial cable play is fully supported, though not tested by your humble reviewer.

Nick Svolos

Designed by: **Celeris**
Distributed by: **Interplay**
Platform: **DOS**

Atari Action Pack Volume II

We're back to the land of the lousy with Volume II of the **Atari Action Pack** for Windows. Yes, once again you will be assailed with mediocre graphics, sound that barely qualifies as such, and, as an added bonus, you can optionally be scolded by your mother, with lines such as "Don't do that, you'll go blind" (oops, not *that* one), or "What are you going to do, play video games for a living," to which we at *Strategy Plus* are living proof of the futility of that particular retort.

This edition has: **Plaque Attack**, tragically one of only a handful of dental hygiene related games ever released; **Barnstorming**, which enters a whole new realm of lameness; **Atlantis**, which was released by the beloved *Imagic* (where are they now?); **Dolphin**, which almost equals **Barnstorming**; **Dragster**, which is considerably lamer than **Barnstorming**; **River Raid II**, which was a minor improvement over the first and is a decent shooter; **Ice Hockey**, which pummels **NHL Hockey** into submission with its realism and action (or maybe not); **Enduro**, which is **Pole Position Lite**; **Keystone Kapers**, a weird run and jump game that is staggeringly repetitive; **Oink**, which brings the story of the three pigs to your high powered PC; **Skiing**, which is admittedly pretty entertaining for all of five minutes, **Stampede** (see **Dragster**); **Laser Blast**, which features lasers and blasting and little else; **Megamania**, an excellent shooter; and **Tennis**, a still-entertaining advanced **Pong** alternative, and my personal favorite of the bunch.

In the end, if you didn't like the first **Atari Action Pack**, you won't like this one. If you did, this is more of the same, but you may be asking yourself what the point is. The graphics are still pathetic – the sound even worse. The gameplay redefines primitive and repetitive and you've just got to ask yourself, "How many of these things do I really want, or need?" One of them was an amusing irony (requiring a high-powered PC to play cruddy games that ran in 4K of RAM). Two is overkill. Of more value would be a *Commodore 64* or *Atari 800* emulator, where gaming started achieving a certain level of sophistication (OK, the truth is we just want to play **M.U.L.E.**).

Steve Bauman

Designed and Published by: **Activision**
Platform: **Windows**

Super Street Fighter II Turbo

It would be easy to dismiss the vast number of fighting games on the market as a sign that the entire game industry consists of a bunch of copycats who wouldn't know an original idea if it bit them on the ass. The fans of the fighting genre would probably point the same finger at the wargame and flight simulation genres, as there are only so many ways you can simulate an airplane, right? The truth of the matter is that each game is subtly different from the others, enough to make people want to buy each one.

Which brings us to the "splatter du jour," the game with the most ridiculous name imaginable, **Super Street Fighter II Turbo**, which is of course a sequel to **Street Fighter** and **Street Fighter II** and is not to be confused with the upcoming **Super Street Fighter II** from *Capcom*. This one is the one from *GameTek*. Got it?

Neither do I, but, when played with a special six-button joypad controller, this is a thoroughly enjoyable basher. You know how to play it – a casual glance at the manual will tell you the various moves and secret attacks of each of the various characters, from Ken and M. Bison to Bill and Hillary. Everything just sort of falls into place, the cosmos realigns, and you can beat the living hell out of the computer. Two players can compete on the same machine, but what these things really need are network and/or modem play (how about a fighting game with more than two people!).

The graphics and animation department is where this basher starts to show its age. The characters are extremely large and cartoon-like, but compared to the digitized characters in **Mortal Kombat II** or the smoothly animated polygon-based characters in titles like **FX Fighter** and **Savage Warriors** they've started to look slightly dowdy.

In the end, if you have a bunch of these kick-punch games, **Super Street Fighter II Turbo** may not bring enough new things to the party to make it worth adding to your swelling collection. If you're new to the fighting ranks or don't particularly care for the more realistic graphic violence in **Mortal Kombat II** then you certainly won't be disappointed with the excellent action found in this title.

Steve Bauman

Designed by: **Capcom**
Distributed by: **GameTek**
Platform: **DOS**

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Hi-Octane

There are times when high-energy, fast-paced racing games are all the rage. Now is one of those times. Be it **Daytona USA** on the *Sega* Saturn, **Ridge Racer** or **Wipeout** on the *Sony* PlayStation, or **Slipstream 5000** on the PC, the goal is fun, arcade-style.

Hi-Octane is a kind of toss-off from *Bullfrog* in the genre, and evidence that a first-rate company's second-tier efforts are still quite good enough. While there are some problems with **Hi-Octane** – notably the limitation in the number of tracks and vehicle options, the number of combat and power-up options in the included vehicle/track situations – the design still plays to all of *Bullfrog*'s characteristic strengths.

First and foremost, it's an incredibly fluid 3D design. **Hi-Octane** is impressive looking, even more so than any of the above-mentioned designs, and is thus a clear demonstration that *Bullfrog* could jump into the more traditional arcade arena if it really wanted to. None of the surfaces cut out, and at least in low-res mode, there's no noticeable slow-down in animation even when a host of vehicles are engaged in a shoot-out at the Fuel Pump Corral, one of the most enjoyable (if least competitive) options during play.

Along with the visual fluidity comes simple and fast arcade-style control. The vehicles are diverse enough in performance and capability to provide a variety of matches during a race, meaning you'll learn different tactics (both race and combat) over time to optimize getting past (or disabling) different opponents. Those different tactics are all joystick-easy, and become intuitive quickly once understood. Like any excellent arcade game, the versatility of the design manifests itself most palpably in the fingertips; **Hi-Octane** will have yours tingling.

The computer competition itself is a mixed bag; on the one hand there are certain opponents (like Mad) who you'll always be gunning for, and who seem to be the Evil One's own medalists. Then there are others who seem way too easy to get rid of or pass. Learning some of the tougher tracks does take some time, a definite plus; learning the easier ones takes too little time, which means too *much* time is spent once you're in a winning groove just spinning 'round the track towards victory.

What makes up for the limitation in computer opponent play is *Bullfrog*'s very successful network play option. If you have a network card and software installed, you'll see the network choice – if you don't you'll just be scratching your head over its mention in the manual. It's there, it's just not visible unless the hardware support's there for it – an interesting design idea. The opening screen before the race represents the slots your network opponents can take prior to race start.

Network play is fast and furious, and probably the top reason to pick up **Hi-Octane**. Because of its simplicity, it's the ideal network racing game – it'll install quickly and have you and your network opponents off and away with a minimum of fuss. Once in network play mode, all the limitations in the design of the competition just fade to black – network racing against human opponents has got to be one of the all-time computer gaming rushes.

Hi-Octane won't have everyone celebrating *Bullfrog* for another act of brilliance, but it won't leave players feeling ripped off, either – especially if they're running it on a network. Consider a Saturn and **Daytona USA** as an alternative, though, if you want *truly* hot computer opponent racing action.

Steve Wartofsky

Designed by: **Bullfrog**
Published by: **Electronic Arts**
Platforms: **DOS, Windows 95 launchable**

FX Fighter

All hail the latest "Best Fighting Game for the PC." **FX Fighter**, from England's *Argonaut Software* (creators of **Creature Shock**, among others), is the current king of the PC fighting games. Utilizing their impressive proprietary *BRender* 3D technology, **FX Fighter** is basically **Virtua Fighter** on your PC. It uses polygons to render all of the characters and motion capture to make the animation look realistic. The polygons look excellent, better than those in **Virtua Fighter**, and the sheer number of animations that each character has is astonishing.

You can control any one of nine different fighters, each of which has 40 different attacks. Each of the fighters, a motley bunch that include robots, giant insects, and an occasional humanoid, have their own styles and custom attacks. There are nine different planets that the battles take place on, each with their own distinctive background. Like **Virtua Fighter**, the backgrounds aren't fixed but rendered in 3D and feature a camera that zooms around the fighters constantly.

Like many games of its ilk it requires the reflexes of a 10 year old to negotiate most of the custom moves (for example, as Jake, to do a 4-hit combo knee throw, just press forward, rotate the gamepad, and punch – all in few-second window of opportunity). The only way to play the game well is with a gamepad, which any fans of this sort of game already own anyway. The game isn't bloody like **Mortal Kombat**, so I suppose that makes it kid friendly.

In the end, the game is quite a technological showcase that doesn't impinge on gameplay. It's quite obvious that *BRender* is an excellent 3D renderer as the texture mapped polygons move around quite smoothly and realistically. The game runs quite cleanly (even in a window under Windows 95!). The action, especially in two player mode (unfortunately only at the same computer) is superb, and the special effects and CD audio are appropriate. All in all, it's the best basher of the year. If you want more information about the moves and hidden combos in the game, check out *GTE Interactive*'s Web site at **http://www.im.gte.com**.

Steve Bauman

Designed by: **Argonaut Software**
Distributed by: **GTE Interactive**
Platform: **DOS**

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Interview
Mike Ditka
Preview
Quarterback Attack with Mike Ditka
Digital Pictures

Thank you for taking time out to talk to us. Can you explain your involvement with this project?
Well, they came to me and said they wanted to put a game together where the coach interacted with the quarterback, and that's what they've done. I'm the coach who interacts with the quarterback. It's quite realistic, in the sense that it's basically the way I would interact with a quarterback on my own team.

So do you offer the player advice during the course of the game?
Advice and criticism. If you don't want to be hollered at, don't buy the game because it's very realistic in that sense. Not that that's good or bad. It's realism. It's not always a bed of roses out there. You don't just turn a knob and everything's always perfect. There's some other things that go on in a football game, and the interplay of the coach and the players is a significant thing.

Do you have any input on the design of the game?
No, it was done by the time I came along, but I did make some changes to the script, what was said, how it was said. Some of it wasn't me, so we did away with that sort of stuff. We tried to make it as realistic as possible. I think it is, but I haven't seen the [final] game yet, so I don't know.

Does the game use real NFL players or teams, or does it feature teams created specifically for this game?
We have two teams of players. There *are* ex-*NFL* and college players as well as actors, but no, it's got nothing to do with the *NFL*. I mean, I'm not with the *NFL*, I'm with *NBC* and they said I can do it, so that's all I care about.

Would you be interested in doing more interactive titles?
I think, when you say "are you interested," it's not a matter of me being interested as much as someone saying that I fit the part of what they're trying to do. I think I fit what *Digital Pictures* was trying to do. There were other coaches they could have tried to get, but I think in terms of what they wanted – and if the game turns out how I anticipate it will – I think the people will really enjoy it.

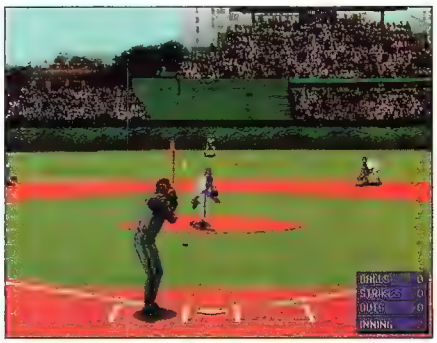
Do you miss coaching?
I think you always miss coaching. When it's in your blood, it's in your blood. Do I dwell on it? No, I don't dwell on it. I had a great career. I had a record that only a few other coaches today have been able to equal. I think owners today want a different kind of coach, one that they can control... [and] that's what they seem to want, and that's fine. I have no problem with that. They don't want anyone with an identity. I enjoy having an identity. I mean, if I didn't have one we wouldn't be talking here. If I weren't successful, no one would know who the hell I was anyway.

Has your comfort with the camera helped with this project?
I've never had trouble with the camera. I learned a long time ago that you're going to say things people aren't going to agree with all of the time, and I think I know enough of what I'm talking about that I can be intelligent with any group of people, whether it be the media, coaches, or so-called geniuses. It's a game of execution. It's a game of teaching. It's not how much I know. It's how much I can teach the players. It's how much we can achieve. That's what it's all about.

Who do you think is the most dominant player in the NFL?
I don't think there's any one dominant player. I mean, you have running backs like Emmitt Smith and Barry Sanders, quarterbacks like Steve Young and Dan Marino, and defensive players like Bruce Smith and Reggie White. So as for a single dominant player, I don't know that there is one, but some of the things I've seen Jerry Rice do...he just looks like a player on a different level than anyone I've ever seen.

Last question. Who's going to win the Super Bowl this year?
I pick San Francisco to beat the New England Patriots. I've got a lot of confidence in Coach [Bill] Parcells, and he's going to at least get them close. Drew Bledsoe is going to be one of the great quarterbacks, he's got his head on straight, and he's got the right coach at the right time in his career.

Steve Bauman



Review
Tony La Russa Baseball 3
Stormfront Studios

Whenever I watch a baseball game on TV, I invariably fire up a baseball game on my PC and play along. Baseball is perfect for this in the sense that it doesn't require your absolute attention all of the time (unlike, say, basketball where if you blink a team can score 20 points). The long pauses are perfect for planning out strategy or for balancing your checkbook.

With the season in full swing, *Stormfront Studios* has delivered another of their excellent baseball titles, **Tony La Russa Baseball 3**. The timing is right (which wasn't the case with their previous title, **ESPN Baseball Tonight**), and it's a vast improvement over the previous **La Russa** games. In one area, though, it's a step backwards. Despite that one problem, **La Russa** is the current champion, equaling and in some respects (especially with its excellent graphics and logical interface) surpassing **Front Page Sports: Baseball**.

The best new feature is the General Manager Challenge, where you can take over a team and set a computer manager to handle the day-to-day chores and concentrate on developing a farm system and making trades. The GM works similar to **FPS: Baseball**'s career mode, only it doesn't take **La Russa** a year to simulate a season like **FPS** does. A season can be completed in a matter of hours. At the completion of each season, the GMs are rated based on the performance of their teams.

To see how accurate it is, I took over my beloved California Angels, and sure enough, despite hiring free agents right and left, they never once rose above third place in the standings. See, just like real life (this year appears to be some sort of *Disney* effect – I'm sure by the time you're reading this the magic of Mickey will have worn off and they will have returned to their usual level of mediocrity).

Statistically, the **La Russa 3** engine is pretty accurate, or perhaps as accurate as it should be, with those weird anomalies which seem to afflict every baseball game. If a game were to replicate

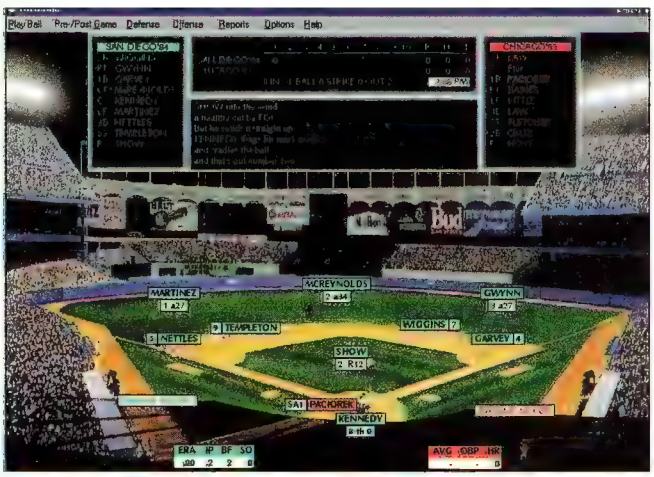
a season in exact details that would be boring, because every year Frank Thomas would win a triple crown, Greg Maddux the Cy Young Award, etc. One thing baseball sims haven't really managed to do is add a "career year" option, where some nobody suddenly sets the world aflame and a superstar has an off year (I believe John Olerud would be a fine example of each of these examples) or a team plays a lot better or worse than it has any right to (like Philadelphia, Detroit, and the Yankees this season).

Despite beefing up the statistics, **La Russa 3** has actually become slightly worse as an arcade game. I've always had each of my baseball games for a specific purpose – **Hardball** was kept for its arcade play, **APBA** for its stats and managing, but **La Russa 2** was one of the few games that held its own in both aspects (it has since been replaced by **Front Page Sports: Baseball**) on my hard drive). **La Russa 3** shares a flaw with *Stormfront's* **Baseball Tonight** in that it just doesn't seem to run at the right speed, even on a 60 MHz Pentium. At a high speed, it's too fast. At the next lower speed, it's too slow. On either setting it's extremely difficult to pick up the ball when on offense, though on defense it doesn't pose any real problem.

Worse yet is the handling of the pitching. You can control the flight of the ball in mid-air, which results in weird motion (not even Greg Maddux can turn a screwball into a curve!). You should select the pitch and location and then use some other method of gauging control. Finally, the voice-over, despite having the choice of three excellent broadcasters, is boring and repetitive.

Overall, I'd say **Tony La Russa 3** is an underachieving .300 hitter – you know it's better than the average, but it could be so much more...

Steve Bauman

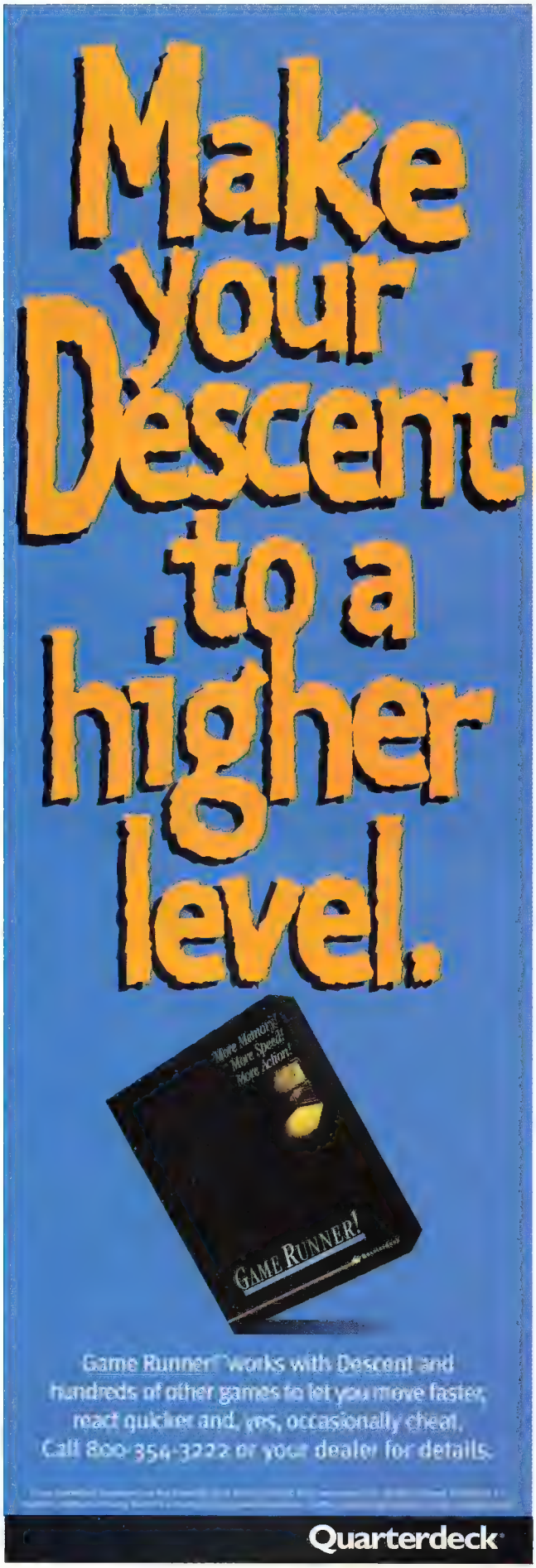


Review
Baseball for Windows 3.0 Broadcast Blast
Miller Associates

It's not that I'm old, but listening to **Baseball for Windows 3.0 Broadcast Blast** immediately transports me back to those days in the 70's (OK, I'm *really* not that old) when I used to sit and listen to the radio and keep score of Dodger games. This was during the glory years – '77 and '78, when it was the Dodgers and the Yankees, and the Dodgers and the Phillies...

What transports you back in time is the absolutely fantastic play-by-play which *Miller Associates* have created for this game. The 2.0 version of this program improved the play-by-play that was initially text-based in this managing-only simulation, but now Hall-of-Famer Ernie Harwell announces the game and it thus literally sounds like a radio broadcast of a live game. Best of all, since it's a Windows application you can minimize the game and work on something else while the play-by-play goes on in the background (assuming you have two computer managers).

What's particularly amazing about the play-by-play is that you don't get that sense of the announcer just reading lines for every conceivable situation. Instead, you get situational emotions for the announcer (he can either root for the home or away team or remain neutral) and ambient fan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effects that are realistic. The audio even has a subdued radio sound to it.

On the game side, the main differences in this version, aside from the voices, are more ballparks (six), more players and teams (3000 and 150, respectively, with the added ability to import players from the **Bill James Electronic Baseball Encyclopedia**), more computer managers, a cleaner interface (with drag and drop lineups – thank you!), new trade functions and more options and online help.

This is a wonderful product. You have an excellent manage-only simulation, which – when combined with the Encyclopedia – provides almost limitless players and statistics and tops it off with an amazing speech engine. If you love baseball, you *must* have this game.

Steve Bauman

Review
Batter Up
Sports Sciences Inc.

Batter Up is a baseball bat for your PC that works with most of the current, and even some older, baseball games – from **Front Page Sports: Baseball** to all of the **Tony La Russa** games. It comes with *Sony*'s **ESPN Baseball Tonight**, but frankly **Hardball IV** is the best arcade baseball game out there and best suited for it. The bat is covered in foam (keep it away from your monitor anyways!) and is a simple device – plug it into your joystick port and whenever you take a swing it sends the equivalent of pressing joystick button one. You have to snap the bat around pretty hard (use extra wrists) to register a swing with the motion detector (or whatever they use). It also works better with a short, compact swing, more Paul Molitor than Jose Canseco.

The bat also works when you switch to defense; it has a cheap gamepad built into the handle. It's not the best in the world but it's free and it keeps you from having to switch to a joystick in mid-game, which would probably freak out most of the games out there. With a list price of $69.99, it's also one of the cheapest ways to add a pseudo-virtual reality device to your PC – think of this combined with a headset and, say, *VR Sports'* upcoming **Baseball** simulation. When do we get the virtual glove, the virtual cup or virtual tobacco? The possibilities are endless...

Discounting the fact that it's easier to play any of these baseball games with a joystick or a gamepad, **Batter Up** is still the ultimate party favor for your next baseball get-together.

Steve Bauman

Review
Devil's Island Fantasy Course
Riviera Country Club Course
Access Software

It's commonly accepted that you're only as good as your latest release, and *Access Software* has little to worry about these days as they continue to embellish their "Winner Of Every Award Known To Man" golfing simulator, **Links 386**.

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the unique vocal ramblings and sterling on-course critique of Bobcat Goldthwait. Now, with the release of a new pair of add-on courses, **Links**ters have some fresh, and in the case of the **Devil's Island Fantasy Course**, remarkable ground to cover. But we'll save the best for last and check out the new **Riviera Country Club** course first.

Here, the news isn't quite as exciting. *Access* marketing ploys to the contrary, *Riviera* simply isn't the troublesome fiend it is in real life. Yes, it's got real long grass in spots, tree-induced claustrophobia, and a cacophony of bunkers and hazards. But with semi-accurate shot-making, these pitfalls just don't come into play as much as you'd think, leaving **Riviera** as one of the least challenging courses in the **Links** arsenal.

Favorite spots? How about the short (176 yard) and potentially deadly sixth, crammed with obstacles and topped with a sand trap plunked right in the middle of the green! Or Hole 5, a 400-odd yard par 4 with dual fairways, one tremendous bend and a flurry of hills on either side acting as a pseudo-pathway to the green. Then there's the 300 yard par 4 10th, where a laser tee shot gets the ball on the green and set for what may be one of the best eagle opportunities to grace the **Links** environment.

However, for a truly unique and downright hellish golfing encounter, there's just no substitute for the other half of the new add-on pairing, the **Devil's Island Fantasy Course**. The only place this baby exists is somewhere deep inside the computer, and that's good, 'cause if real players had a chance to tackle the real thing, there'd be suicides galore in the golfing community.

It says right there on the CD jewel box "Get ready to walk the plank, Matey your scorecard is about to take a dive," and truer words were never spoken. **Devil's Island** is a hilly, curving masterpiece of mayhem located in a colorful, tropical island paradise that'll have you admiring the beauty as you curse the layout.

This is one course where fly-bys are mandatory, as you usually can't see just where you're going. Palm trees and stunning fauna are the least of the worries, with both fresh and salt water hazards, grassy knolls, rock formations, exotic statues, and yes, even pirate galleons and volcanoes combining to make the tee to green excursion one of utter terror. And once you get there, things just get worse – greens are undulating, angled and anything but ordinary.

Hole 1 prepares you for what lies ahead. A horseshoe-shaped fairway laden with bunkers follows the craggy shoreline, and to be in visual range of the pin after two shots means things are going very well indeed, yet **Devil's Island** goes from challenging to frightening by the time the fifth hole rolls around. Again clinging to the waterfront, this hole brings about the first in-play shipwreck I've ever seen (ever bank one off a mast?), and certainly prompts proper use of the directional marker. Hole 6, a relatively straight 400 yard par 4, is the first real birdie opportunity on the Island, but things get worrisome again mid-course.

Like beckoning lily pads in a pond of tall grass, Hole 11 sports a segmented fairway, while Hole 14 begs for mulligans with its island-like green, connected by a narrow isthmus/fairway. The 16th hole features a jagged green which slopes hard right into the ocean; the final test is immense at 600 yards, with numerous fresh water rivulets, a green hemmed in by sand, and a volcano that should darn well erupt if you can actually par the thing.

One small warning – sometimes the **Devil's Island** graphics don't reveal the length and vertical climb of every hole accurately. I found myself scooping into my bag of mulligans several times, as shots just wouldn't traverse countryside that seemed perfectly attainable on screen. Fortunately, that happened infrequently, leaving **Devil's Island** playing a fine Mr. Hyde to **Riviera**'s Dr. Jeckyl – something for all levels of **Links** players.

Gordon Goble

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Guy with an attitude

Strategic Steve:

Interesting editorial. You continue to be the most incisive of all gaming editors *[that won't continue if I keep having to get teeth pulled! — ed.]*.

Let's get to some points:

1) Not all of us like to tinker with CONFIG.SYS, boot disks, and mem solutions. Techies you call them. Load and play, man!!

2) You answer a guy complaining about IBM PC's vs. Segas with the comparison of a sports car (manual) and a *Geo Prizm* (automatic). I say, get a Lexus and put your right hand on Uma Thurman's leg!!

3) Playstation: a serious attempt by the Japanese to assault the PC Empire and yes, if *Thrustmaster* or *CH* makes a HOTAS Setup for these new consoles things could get real interesting. Remember, the Tokyo gang *just* got interested in Sims, HUDs, POVs, etc. They say in a couple of years their games will look like *Babylon 5* [special] effects.

4) These machines (PC's) have *got* to come down in price! Two thousand dollars is ridiculous. If this was a new kind of gas would we throw away our cars to use it? *[here our lovely correspondent starts to ramble, the effects of his nitrous oxide beginning to wear off...]* — I don't think you would, I blame the PC makers more than the game designers. I think modular Plug and Play is better, but we're still talking 2 grand. Actually, we've forgotten about the games and gone spec (tech) hapy.

Looks Good and Plays Well is the hype I look for. Remember the car comparison (fuel-injected, 200 horses, 0-60)? It's the ride, Steve, ride, and that's the bottom line. My Prediction: here come the Japanese, watch out!

I just wanna play,
Ed McDonald

Dear Ed,

Whew! Uma Thurman? Okay. Now we know what PC gamers are really *thinking about when they're fussing over hardware specs. Glad to see you agree with Bonnie Raitt on these issues ("it's not the meat, it's the motion," circa 1973 or thereabouts, the more things change...). Don't get paranoid about the Japanese, they just wanna have a good time, too. If they can give us a good time for an eighth of what we've been used to paying for it, well, that's called competition, eh? Only the strong survive. Welfare for lazy corporations, who needs it? Get with the program, America; practice what you preach. - ed.*

Straight from the street

Yo!! Whatza matter with you all?!?! The 3DO is HOTT!! *[six, er, I mean, sic]* **Panz Gen** rocks!

James A. Squires
<jas@jas.com>

Hey, James!

Straight and to the point! Okay, yeah, 3DO is hot, it's just too much trouble to get screenshots, and we don't have a beta-running machine! Seriously, though, 3DO, Saturn, PSX, Ultra, they're all seriously cool, just not our turf. Personally, I don't see any really high-quality magazines covering games on these platforms the way they deserve to be covered, hope that changes soon. -ed.

Keep those genres clean

Hi,

I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your round-up of *E3™*, which I read in the August issue. I play a lot of games just as they come out, before they're reviewed, so I tend to depend on the gaming magazines more for previews than for reviews. Given your excellent round-up of past *Consumer Electronics Shows*, I knew I could count on you guys for the best coverage. *Electronic Entertainment* did a cursory review, not giving the names of too many games, and *Computer Game Review* ran a bunch of names with no descriptions *[hey, we do that sometimes, too, though unintentionally! - ed.]* - useless! Some of those magazines even had the audacity to write lead-ins saying, in effect, "because the conference was so vast, we couldn't possibly cover it all very well." Nonsense, particularly after seeing the jobs you guys did.

Sierra wasn't on your list, though. Were they not at the show? Not that they needed to be in the round-up. That company knows how to get publicity, so I think most people know what's coming from them soon: **King's Quest 1,000,000**.

The only thing I was disappointed about was to see the cross-genrification of games (if there is such a word). Many I know like that, but I'm strictly a graphics adventure player, and if there's combat or battle

sequences, I'm less interested. So I don't know what I'll do about **Mission Critical** or **Ripper**, for example.

I also wonder if it *[cross-genrification]* makes the game more difficult to develop. You raved about **A Final Unity**, but even though I admired the story and the technology behind the game, the adventure puzzles are easy and boring (watch the field unit move slowly across the screen for five minutes while it collects a specimen) and I find the combat difficult. I designated Worf and LeForge to do the engineering and tactical, but that doesn't work once you venture into Romulan space, 30 light years from a black hole, to try to figure out coordinates of the Unity Device. I may give up on the game because I've fought the Warbirds about 20 times, died each time, and now I'm tired of the game.

Buried in Time, which I just started playing, is more my style. So far no battle scenes, but some may be coming, I guess. The puzzles and codes you must unravel to explore further in the castle and the Mayan ruins are fascinating *[typical computer gamer - he sees castles, Mayan ruins and puzzles and codes, and what does he find fascinating? The puzzles and codes]*.

Well, that's more words than I originally intended to write, but gamers do go on, don't they?

Anyway, great job on the *E3* roundup!

John Luiz
jluiz@ix.netcom.com

Dear John,

Not sure in your case, but I know many adventure gamers have found real-time sequences in adventure games a bother in the past in part because those real-time sequences have been done poorly, or have (as the example you describe above) taken up an inordinately large proportion of the game's playing time. In the weakest designs of the past, throwing a near-impossible real-time section into an adventure game was a great way to provide the illusion of a longer game in an otherwise short or too-easy design. The thinking (if you can call it that) was that the extended time required to complete an action section would make gamers feel like they got more game than they really did. I'd still be suspicious of that possibility in adventure design these days.

The other sad thing is, most adventure game designers - and most adventure game design companies - don't really know how to design an excellent, real-time game (particularly if it's arcade). There are games a decade old on the home console systems which, in terms of sheer arcade-gaming design, are real light-years ahead of most of what you'll find on a home computer, and it has nothing to do with hardware capability. Companies who want to do arcade in their design need to find people who've got real experience with arcade game design, it's yet another area in PC gaming that remains mostly amateurish at best. Partly 'cause it's not considered a priority.

Just because we've advanced technologically in graphics (primarily) design and CPU speed, doesn't mean we're guaranteed concomitant advances in gameplay.

On the other hand, borrowing across genres, if done well (i.e. if not just the result of attempts at quick linkings between different kinds of gameplay), can freshen stale formulas. It's the hope here that in a number of instances such borrowings will prove fruitful; the results will take time to come to fruition, however. Here's predicting that the first efforts to cross genres effectively will result in major game breakthroughs. Has that happened yet for you in anything? When it does, please let us know!

Meanwhile, Warbirds! Brings back fond memories of a classic Lynx game... a multi-player WWI air combat sim on a portable! Check it out if you ever get a chance. - ed.

Men of few words dept

Dear Sirs,

I read your magazine for the captions.

Mr. Sarcasm
Podunk, ILL

Dear Sarcasm,

We put out this magazine just so we can receive letters just like yours. Have a nice day. - Steve B.

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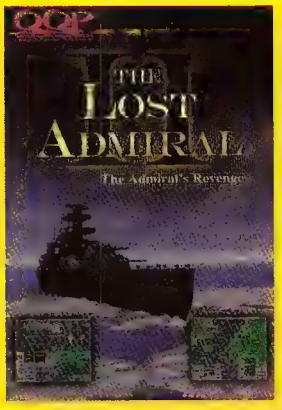

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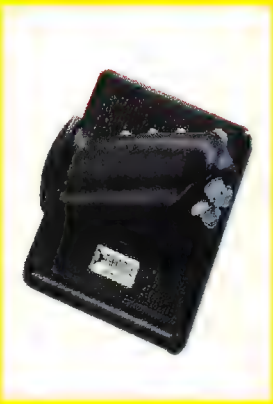

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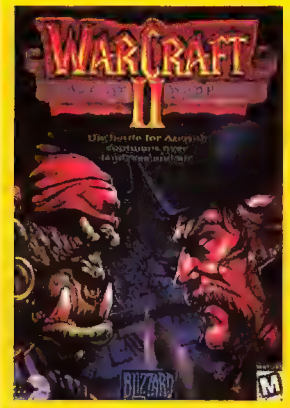

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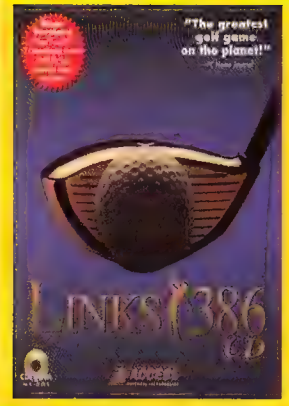

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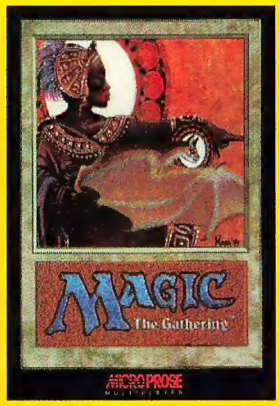

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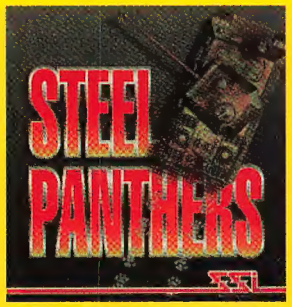

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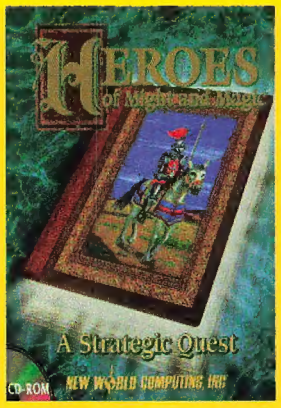

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